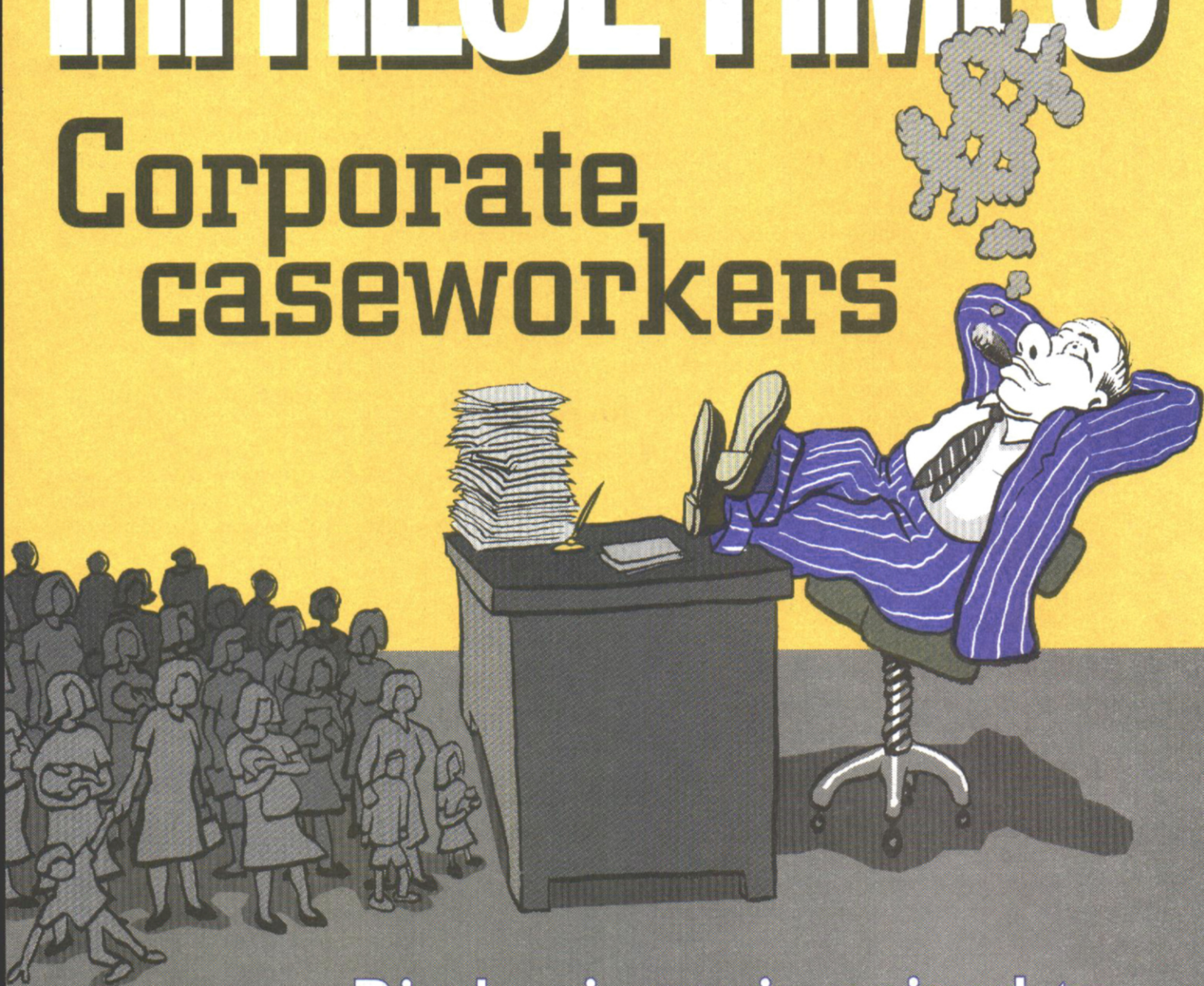


SUMMER READING

June 16-29, 1997

# IN THESE TIMES

## Corporate caseworkers



Big business is poised to  
cash in on welfare reform.  
Adam Fifiield reports

\$2.50/CANADA \$3.50

22



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



# EDITORIAL

## THE MILITARY BUDGET BOONDOGGLE

For the past month, the Pentagon and the White House have been conducting an invisible campaign to head off opposition to increased military spending. Announcing that it was closing dozens of additional military bases, the Pentagon sold the commercial media on the idea that we have lived through a period of drastic military cutbacks. The result is that journalists now routinely talk about the military as if it had suffered since the end of the Cold War. To set the tone, Secretary of Defense William Cohen joined the chorus in mid-May with his announcement that the time had come to end the Cold War dividend.

Of course, there has been no Cold War dividend. The end of the Cold War was supposed to free up resources for increased spending on education, housing and infrastructure rebuilding. It remained a dream, however, as the paltry reductions in military outlays went to deficit reduction along with massive cuts in domestic spending. Like Ronald Reagan and George Bush, Clinton has consistently forced cuts in domestic programs by keeping military spending high. This is the cost, in Clinton's words, of "America's leadership in harnessing the global forces of integration"—meaning the cost of continuing to reduce the rest of the world, and particularly the underdeveloped world, to adjuncts of Corporate America.

Now, following the Pentagon's quadrennial review of projected military needs, military spending will increase to \$266.8 billion in 1998 and to \$273.1 billion in 2002. The recent budget deal protects this spending by creating budget "firewalls" around military funding for 1998 and 1999. The rationale for this five-year, \$1.4 billion waste of resources is that the United States must be prepared to fight two full-scale wars against unknown and unforeseeable opponents at the same time.

Who are these potential enemies? Certainly there are none threatening to invade the United States, or even our major allies in Europe or Asia. Indeed, the second most powerful military power, Russia, is going in the opposite direction. In

late May, President Boris Yeltsin announced that Russia was cutting back on its military spending by some 40 percent over the next two to three years because the military was diverting too many resources from the development of the country's domestic economy.

The threat, if one can call it that, is said to come from increasingly unstable situations in the developing world. But that is a threat in large part of the U.S. government's own making.

During the Cold War, U.S. military suppliers accounted for about 13 percent of global arms sales. Since the collapse of the Berlin Wall in late 1989, U.S. arms sales have rocketed. In the past seven years, the United States has sold roughly \$100 billion worth of weapons abroad. As other nations have reduced their arms sales, American military manufacturers have increased their share of the market to 70 percent. Clinton has pushed these sales as vigorously as his predecessors. His administration has funneled subsidies to the arms industry to facilitate exports, arguing that foreign arms sales keep U.S. procurement costs down and jobs at home. But, as a special *Boston Globe* report on the global

*The government justifies a bloated military budget by pointing to global threats created by U.S. arms sales.*

arms trade concluded, "while leading defense manufacturers report big profits, surging stock prices and huge increases for top executives ... there has been no visible sign of reduced costs to the military, and the hemorrhaging of American jobs continues." Indeed, the *Globe* notes, to secure these sales, thousands of production jobs are often shipped overseas along with the technology needed for recipient nations to create their own arms industries.

In other words, the Pentagon and the Clinton administration are actively engaged in creating the threat that they say we must be prepared to meet. For without foreign arms sales,

and especially the sale of manufacturing equipment and know-how, there would be nothing to defend against.

The only significant opposition to the military spending authorized in the budget deal has been voiced by the 109 members of the House Progressive Caucus. In a letter to Clinton in late April, caucus chairman Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA) urged the president to reject any deal that cut domestic programs while leaving military spending at Cold War levels. Frank also promised to use the appropriations process to fight the deal.

However, the budget went through with an increase of \$53 billion in military spending over the next five years, along with \$115 billion in cuts in Medicare, more than a \$30 billion reduction in food stamps and the elimination of funds to rebuild crumbling schools. ◀

**IN THESE TIMES**  
 "...with liberty and justice for all"

**Editor:** James Weinstein  
**Executive Editor:** Deidre McFadyen  
**Senior Editors:** Joel Bleifuss, David Moberg,  
 Salim Muwakkil  
**Culture Editor:** Pat Arnow  
**Associate Editor:** Dave Mulcahey  
**Contributing Editors:** Patricia Aufderheide  
 Linda DeLibero, Miles Harvey, Diana  
 Johnstone, Pete Karman, Chris Lehmann,  
 Fred Weir  
**Editorial Interns:** Gretchen Purser,  
 Norman Wishner

**Art Director:** Kit Boyce  
**Assistant Art Director:** Jim Rinnert  
**Illustrators:** Sheila Flinchbaugh,  
 Terry LaBan

**Publisher:** James Weinstein  
**Associate Publisher:** Beth Schulman  
**Assistant Publisher:** Claudia Morris

**Business Manager:** Robert Larson  
**Circulation Director:** Jake Blankenship  
**Advertising Director:** Patricia Gray

*In These Times* (ISSN 0160-5992) is published biweekly by the Institute for Public Affairs, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. Subscriptions are \$36.95 a year (\$59 for institutions; \$61.95 Canada; \$76.95 overseas). Second-class postage paid at Chicago, IL and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *In These Times*, 303 E. Hitt St., Mt. Morris, IL 61054. This issue (Vol. 21, No. 15) published June 16, 1997, for newsstand sales June 16-29, 1997. (773) 772-0100. Member: Alternative Press Syndicate. The entire contents of *In These Times* are copyright ©1997 by the Institute for Public Affairs, and may not be reproduced in any manner, either in whole or in part, without permission of the publisher. Copies of *In These Times'* contract with the National Writers Union are available upon request. Complete issues and volumes of *In These Times* are available from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI. All rights reserved. *In These Times* is indexed in both the Alternative Press Index and the Left Index. Publisher does not assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts or material. Manuscripts or material unaccompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope will not be returned. All correspondence should be sent to: *In These Times*, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. E-mail: it@igc.apc.org. For customer service and to place subscription orders, call toll free: (800) 827-0270. Advertising rates sent on request. Available back issues are \$5 each; specify volume and number. All letters received by *In These Times* become property of the newspaper. We reserve the right to print letters in condensed form.

COVER ©1997 KIT BOYCE

©1997 SHEILA FLINCHBAUGH

# InTHESETIMES

## CONTENTS

Volume 21, Number 15

### Privatizing the dole

*Welfare reform opens the door to big business.*

ADAM FIFIELD

14



### Revolt of the haves

*Rent regulation goes the way of the dodo bird.*

ROBERT NEUWIRTH

20

### Summer reading

*In These Times editors' top picks*

32



## FEATURES

The First Stone: Ditching dioxin • Joel Bleifuss.....	12
France's eroding welfare state • James Cohen.....	17
Deconstructing blackness • Salim Muwakkil.....	25
In the End: The squeegee kids • Clive Thompson.....	40

## REVIEWS

Film: <i>Mondo</i> • Linda DeLibero.....	28
In Print: <i>Promiscuities</i> • Emily Gordon.....	34

## DEPARTMENTS

Letters.....	4	Appall-O-Meter.....	7
Sylvia • Nicole Hollander.....	4	The Big Picture • Grady Klein.....	8
In Short.....	6	Huge Mouth • Peter Hannan.....	11



# LETTERS

## Sour grapes

Sometimes people on the left fall into the trap of thinking that nothing is better than something, as long as it has the correct line. This view apparently ensnared Hilary Wainwright in her assessment of the May 1 victory of Tony Blair of Britain's Labor Party ("In Maggie's closet," May 12).

By most definitions, Labor's program is progressive. Enacting a proportional representation system would represent an extraordinary change in the English body politic, and significantly influence events beyond Britain's borders. Devolving political power to Wales and Scotland would further the anti-colonial trends of this century. Passing a written bill of rights and a freedom of information act would better protect individual liberty and help curtail the notorious English culture of official secrecy.

Labor also wants to revitalize the National Health Service, strengthen

gun-control laws, set higher standards for schools, phase out subsidies to private schools and reduce class size in the public ones. The Blair government is also promising to formulate a national minimum wage.

Moreover, the government promises a tax on windfall, excess profits of newly privatized industries. The revenue generated will be spent on creating jobs for a quarter-million young unemployed people. Labor desires closer relations with the rest of Europe, including becoming part of the European Convention on Human Rights. The party also promises Britain's signature on a social charter of workplace rights.

These major programs are in line with what Britons need and desire. True, Blair does not plan to renationalize—but where is the consensus for such a move?

Imposing harsher penalties on violent juveniles, which Labor advocates, is popular on both sides of the Atlantic.

It is probably bad policy, but falls far short of "social authoritarianism."

The Labor Party now has the power to enact these reforms. British political power lies in the House of Commons. Unlike the United States, our British cousins lack a separation of powers to brake a majoritarian legislative agenda. The party that enjoys even a single-seat majority in parliament can make into law whatever policies it desires.

After 18 years of Tory rule, Tony Blair's Labor is much preferable. If mass movements of the left develop, there is little doubt that the Blair government would be receptive to them. The same cannot be said of the previous Conservative governments.

William J. Volonte  
New Brunswick, N.J.

## Transpolitics

As a lifelong progressive and a subscriber to *In These Times*, I am writing to express my deep concern and distress at the offensive use of transgender images and metaphors in your cover article on British Labor's shift to the right.

I am a male-to-female transsexual, in the early stages of transition. After nearly half a century in the closet, I am finally beginning the difficult process of coming to terms with, and acting upon, my gender identity. Thus it is particularly upsetting to see a progressive publication of *In These Times*' stature stoop to abusive stereotyping to introduce Hilary Wainwright's article.

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



In the cover illustration and headline, cross-dressing is used as a metaphor for reaction, deceit and unprincipled behavior. Wainwright carries the

cent of us (including myself) have been assaulted during our lives because of our gender expression; several transgendered people are murdered for the

the history of psychiatry are producing, the problem for our society and democracy would seem to lie less in "gatekeeper" psychiatrists than in politically correct intellectuals who confuse rhetoric with reality and hyperbole with fact.

George Fish  
Indianapolis

## Bought the farm

Salim Muwakkil's review of "When We Were Kings" ("The other prophet Muhammad," May 12) seems to be assembled from press-kit puffs rather than an insightful viewing of the film. He makes the director, Leon Gast, heroic for having "faced obstacle after obstacle," though he never mentions what these obstacles were and doesn't question Gast's peculiar reliance on George Plimpton and Norman Mailer, the white folks' white folk, as the primary firsthand chroniclers. It comes as no surprise that most of Plimpton's and Mailer's commentary focuses on their own thoughts, feelings and behavior.

Worse yet is the review's indifference to the shallow and shabby treatment of women in the film. Repeated shots of the bouncing breasts and posteriors of the women performers in contrast with the face shots of their male counterparts reveal that though "Gast spent 23 years trying to finish this documentary," he learned nothing during that time about more progressive ways to present women's images. The "We" in the film's title refers more to Plimpton, Mailer and Gast than to any African. That Ali still manages to emerge with his heroism intact is due more to his stature than the film's. Too bad Muwakkil bought the hype.

David Linton

Chair, Communication Arts Department  
Marymount Manhattan College  
New York

**Editor's note:** Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters.



image further, suggesting that Tony Blair has done virtually everything short of having the operation to become Mrs. Thatcher. Thus, sex reassignment surgery equals sell-out.

Just a metaphor? Well, imagine the reaction from your readers if you had used offensive images of gay people (for example, an illustration of Blair in bed with John Major) or racial minorities to criticize Blair politically.

Although I could hardly agree more that New Labor's nearly complete abandonment of progressive politics is a terrible setback for Britain and the left, the kind of ridicule of transgendered people implicit in this article is itself a betrayal of humane values. It is this kind of attack that makes it more difficult for people like me to come out.

The transgendered are one of the most marginalized and stigmatized of minorities. We have little legal protection; in most jurisdictions in the United States, it is entirely legal to discriminate against us. We are one of Jesse Helms' favorite targets. For the most part, our public image is that of talk-show freaks.

Worse, we are often the targets of violence. A recent study of 400 transgendered people found that 60 per-

cent of us (including myself) have been assaulted during our lives because of our gender expression; several transgendered people are murdered for the

Name withheld on request

## Get real

As a psychiatric patient on lithium and Prozac for severe depression, I found appalling the hysterical tone and unsubstantiated conclusions of Cheryce Kramer's review of Edward Shorter's *A History of Psychiatry* ("Psychiatry on the couch," May 12). My psychoactive drugs do not put me in a state of "perpetual bliss." They do not transport me on a magic carpet to a Prozac-induced nirvana. They do enable me to function as a normal human being without immobilizing and sometimes suicidal depression. Thanks to lithium and Prozac, I am able to hold a job, carry on a productive career as a freelance writer and build fulfilling personal and social relationships. Just like millions of other psychiatric patients, or mental-health consumers, whom Kramer seems to be accusing of weakly seeking escape from the world.

If Kramer is typical of what the graduate schools of psychology and



# IN SHORT



## To the barricades, baristas!

**F**rappuccino, skinny latte, Canadian Auto Workers job-action leaflets? That's what's on offer to customers of several Starbucks outlets in Vancouver, British Columbia, where the Seattle-based coffee giant is finding itself in, er, hot water during contract negotiations with the first union in its 25-year history.

Starbucks has been at the bargaining table since last October, when workers at Starbucks outlets in Vancouver applied for and won certification as members of the Canadian Auto Workers Union (CAW).

After voting 92 percent in favor of a strike in March, the 110 employees at eight Starbucks stores and a distribution center began on May 16 to wear their street clothes to

work, leaflet customers and picket the distribution center, which delivers pastries to Starbucks outlets throughout the province.

Union representative Roger Crowther says the workers are frustrated with what he calls Starbucks' belligerence and its unwillingness to negotiate. He said the union, which is currently in a legal position to strike, will not hesitate to do so if the coffee giant doesn't start bargaining. Starbucks left the negotiating table on May 7, saying the union had not significantly changed its position.

The major issue in the negotiations is wages. The union wants the starting wage for counter workers—"baristas" in Starbucks—increased from the minimum wage of \$7 an hour Canadian (\$4.20 U.S.) to \$10 an hour (\$7 U.S.)

"It's very difficult to live on \$7 an hour in British Columbia," Crowther says, adding that the 24 hours of training the workers go through before serving at Starbucks and the high premium the company places on service make the baristas worth more than the minimum wage.

In addition to wage hikes, the union is pushing for paid sick leave for baristas and shift scheduling based on worker seniority. Les Bond, a member of the union bargaining committee who has worked for three and a half years at a Starbucks outlet in Vancouver, says that senior workers want assurances that their shifts won't be reassigned to newer, lower-paid workers. Currently, Starbucks stores supposedly schedule workers primarily based on availability, but Bond and others suspect that the company gives more hours to lower-paid workers as a way to cut costs.

Starbucks spokesperson Alan Gulick declines to comment on whether Starbucks will present a counter offer on the wage issue, saying only that the company believed the wage demands were unreasonable. He faults the union for being inflexible, pointing out that the two sides have already resolved 111 of 145 issues.

The labor unrest comes as a shock to Starbucks, which has carefully cultivated an image as a caring, equitable employer. The company refers to its workers as "partners"

©1997 TERRY LABAN

and makes much of the fact that it offers benefits, stock options and a free pound of coffee every week to its part-time workers.

At the company's annual shareholders' meeting, Starbucks president Howard Schultz called the Vancouver unionization "a little unnerving."

Tensions in the negotiations increased shortly after the strike vote, when Starbucks announced it would close the distribution center, where nine of the 110 unionized employees work. In response, the union filed a complaint with the British Columbia Labor Relations Board alleging that the closing was an illegal lockout and unfair labor practice designed to intimidate employees. Starbucks argues that the distribution center was a pilot project that didn't work.

Bond, the union organizer, notes that Starbucks has grown very quickly over the past three years from a smaller, more personal company into a large corporation, and workers are just trying to defend their right to a share of the company's success.

"We still care about the company and the product," Bonds says. "We want the company to recognize the value of its employees and give us a good living."

Meanwhile, the current job action is having an encouraging effect on workers at nonunionized Starbucks outlets in the area. The CAW has just applied for certification at a ninth outlet in Vancouver, a development Crowther attributes to publicity generated by the job action. "We now have access to nonunion stores to tell our side of the story," he says. "The baristas are picking up the leaflets and talking about it."

—Nicole Nolan

## An end to slave wages?

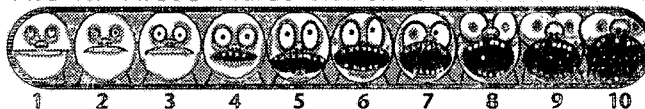
Over the last two years, New York City's government has cut 21,000 full-time workers—and added 35,000 workfare positions. Those forced into the city's Work Experience Program (WEP) to obtain benefits have served mostly as clerical assistants and park maintenance workers, saving the city hundreds of millions of dollars a year in employee wages. It's a trend that has been dubbed "slavefare" by those resentful of doing the city's work for nothing more than the equivalent of minimum wage in welfare checks and food stamps.

That may change, however, following a ruling in a class-action lawsuit filed on behalf of Boris Brukhman, an electrical engineer who has earned the equivalent of minimum wage in benefits doing electrical work for the city—work that would pay \$18 an hour for a regular employee. On May 12, Acting State Supreme Court Justice Jane Solomon ruled that the city

*Continued on page 9*

## APPALL-O-METER

THE IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



By David Futrella

### Smoked out 9.6

In an astonishing case that, nevertheless, will probably not do much to dampen Cigar Chic among old geezers and young hipsters alike, a Florida man recently burned himself to death while trying to light his cigar—and was unable to scream for help because throat cancer had destroyed his vocal cords.

Abraham Mosley, 64, confined to a bed in his kitchen by his smoking-related illness, was attempting to light up with strips of paper held over a burner on the stove because, The Associated Press reports, "his cancer left him unable to manipulate matches or a lighter. The flaming paper ignited gauze bandages that were around his neck. The fire then spread to his pajamas." By the time the smoke alarm went off and woke his sister, it was too late. "I don't ever want to witness anything like I witnessed this morning," she told the press. "That will stay with me the rest of my life. He was a walking torch when I woke up." Officials, perhaps looking for a silver lining to all of this smoke, told the press that because of his cancer, Mosley wouldn't have lived much longer in any case.



### Fashion police 6.5

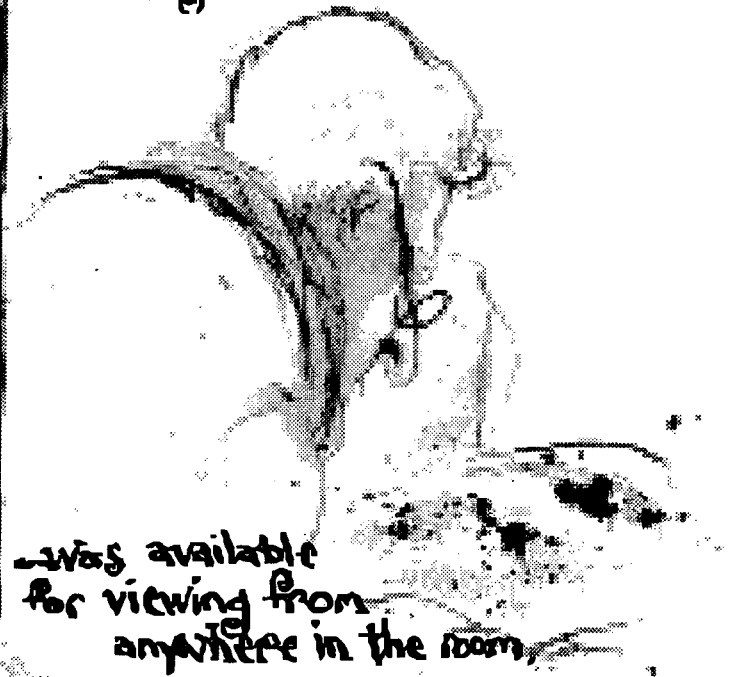
An American tourist caused a ruckus in the British press in May after she was forcibly ejected from Harrod's department store—for wearing clothes the store regarded as just a bit too tacky. Eilene Kadden, a middle-aged children's clothing wholesaler from Los Angeles, told the British press she had been horrified and angered by the ordeal. "It was so humiliating," she told the *Express*. "A bodyguard took me by the arm and asked me to leave the store." Her crime? She was wearing an outfit consisting of brown Lycra leggings and an oversized long-sleeved shirt embroidered with flowers and cacti. Kadden says she was discriminated against by "fattist" store employees because she's a bit oversized; her mother, wearing a similar outfit, wasn't shown the door. "I was looking classy and funky and smarter than other shoppers in worn jeans and dirty tennis shoes," Kadden told the press. A Harrod's spokesman told London's *Daily Telegraph* he was "unimpressed" that her leggings had, in fact, been bought at Harrod's. "We sell cigarettes but we don't allow people to smoke. We sell beds but we don't let people use them," he explained. "We are not fattist. The security man believed she was in leggings that appeared to be tights because they were so stretched."

Dr. Lyulph Ydwallo Odin  
Nestor Egbert, the great  
Analyst of Deficiencies...



...thought often of buying  
advertising on the subway.

Save directly from behind,  
this gentleman's nostril...



...was available  
for viewing from  
anywhere in the room.

Grady Klein

I reside confident  
in the knowledge that  
I have no  
Intend."





*Continued from page 7*

had violated the state constitution, which requires that prevailing wages be paid in all public works activities.

Solomon's ruling—which Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has announced he will appeal—would guarantee all workfare participants wages (though not benefits) similar to those of their salaried co-workers, which for most entry-level city workers range from \$8 to \$10 an hour. While the ruling is not expected to raise benefit levels in New York City, it would reduce the number of hours that welfare participants must spend “working off” their benefits. Currently, workfare assignees are expected to work 20 to 25 hours a week; this could drop to 10 hours a week or less if hours are calculated at the higher prevailing wages.

That's especially good news for city college students receiving welfare, many of whom have been forced to choose between attending classes and losing their benefits for missing workfare assignments. Though higher education has been found to be the most reliable way off welfare—89 percent of City University of New York graduates formerly on public assistance found steady jobs after graduation—the CUNY system has lost more than 5,000 students receiving welfare since tougher WEP requirements went into effect in 1995.

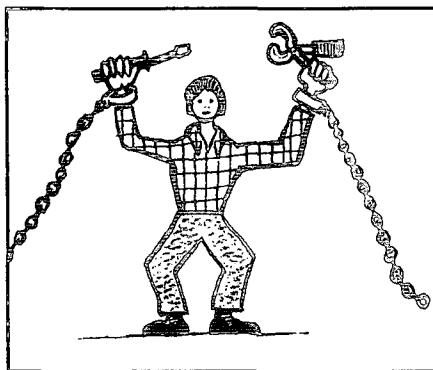
Reduction in workfare hours would also have a dramatic impact on city government. In the face of massive budget cuts, the city has come to rely almost entirely on workfare participants to supply basic services in areas like parks and sanitation. “They can't come up with bond issues and WEP workers as a plan every year,” says Maureen Lane of the Welfare Rights Initiative, a project of current and former welfare participants at city university campuses. “Sooner or later, they're going to have to sit down and think of a way that the government of the city and the state of New York

can generate income.”

Though Solomon's ruling applies only to New York City, welfare rights advocates are already anticipating similar suits in other parts of New York state as well as in other states with prevailing-wage laws. Marc Cohan, an attorney with the Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law who represented Brukman, says his organization is looking into filing suits in at least two states with similar wage guarantees.

The New York ruling came the same week as President Clinton's announcement that he supports the continued application of minimum-wage laws to workfare assignments. (Some state governors had pressed Clinton to allow sub-minimum-wage levels.) These events have sparked cautious optimism among welfare participants that the general public is recognizing that “people who work are workers, period,” says Lane. “There's no such thing in this country, in this day and age, of any kind of slave labor.”

—Neil deMause



## Russia's flesh exports

Billboards placed strategically around the arrival lobby of Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport say “Night Flight, Do It Tonight”—a little nudge and wink to guide visitors toward Russia's fastest-growing industry. Few require an explanation. Turbulent and poverty-stricken post-Soviet Russia has gained notoriety as a leading producer and exporter of impoverished women who are willing to do almost anything for money.

Night Flight might be described as the manufacturer's showroom. The four-year-old, Swedish-managed nightclub, a stone's throw from the Kremlin, is by now a Moscow landmark. Every night, hundreds of sexily-clad young

## Divide and conquer

ON MAY 13, NEW MEXICO'S THIRD CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT SENT REPUBLICAN BILL REDMOND TO THE HOUSE OF Representatives. Redmond, who will fill the seat vacated by newly appointed UN Ambassador Bill Richardson, scored an upset victory with 43 percent of the vote. Democratic candidate Eric Serna polled 40 percent of the vote, and, to the surprise of many, Carol Miller of the Green Party got 17 percent.

It would be easy to blame the ultraconservative Redmond's victory on a split in the “vital center.” In fact, the election result points up the Democratic Party's lack of ideas and purpose. Miller, a former Democrat, built her campaign around popular progressive issues: campaign finance reform, universal health care and environmental protection. She also won the endorsement of the state's two largest papers, the *Albuquerque Journal* and the *Taos News Tribune*. The best Serna could do was make the case that a vote for Miller was a vote for Redmond. Sad but true—and that will remain the case until Congress is elected through a system of proportional representation. —Joel Bleifuss

## Reality check

COUNT IT AS ANOTHER BLOW TO JOURNALISTIC INTEGRITY.

In an editorial published May 11 in the *San Jose Mercury-News*, editor Jerry Ceppos explained that Gary Webb's August 1996 series on the Los Angeles contra-cocaine connection "fell short of my standards." Three days later, a *New York Times* editorial lauded Ceppos for his "courageous gesture."

Jim Naureckas, editor of *Extral*, the publication of Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting, agrees that the *Mercury-News* could have done better. "There are flaws in the series," Naureckas says. "Though I think it is interesting that Ceppos mentioned only those flaws that make the series more damaging to the CIA—not those flaws that make it less damaging. The *Mercury-News* did not put the [Los Angeles-based drug ring] in the context of the many other contra-linked drug operations. Nor did it put the contra drug operations in the context of the many other CIA covert operations that were heavily involved in drug trafficking. But if Ceppos had mentioned those flaws, he wouldn't have gotten the pat on the head from the *New York Times*." —J.B.

women file past hard-eyed "face controllers" and take up stations on the club's strobe-lit dance floor or drape themselves across bar stools.

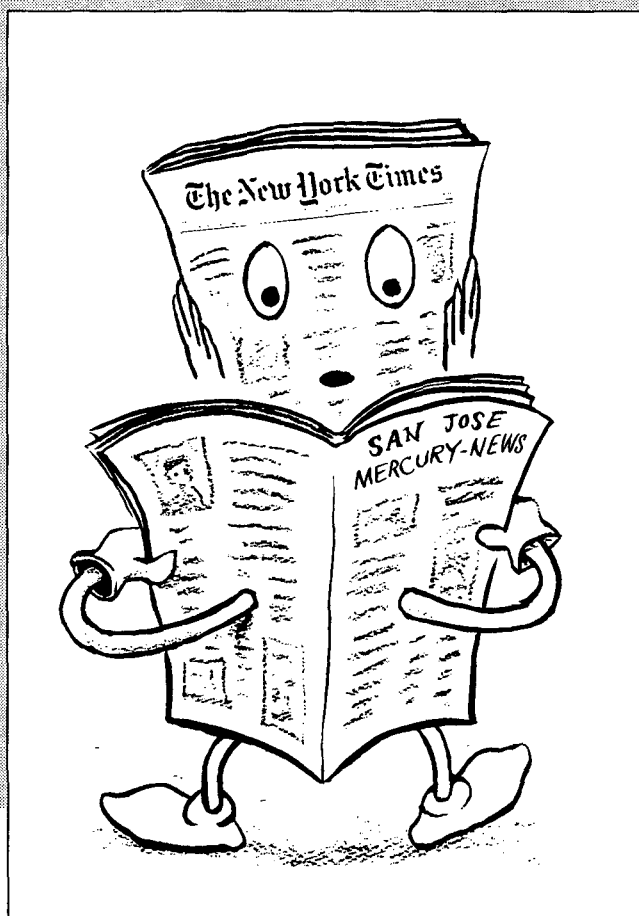
The male clients are mostly visiting foreign businessmen, truckers and construction workers. They enter past half a dozen burly security guards, who scrutinize each one carefully and frisk the few they suspect may be carrying a weapon. For a \$30 cover charge, a man is entitled to one free drink and all the ogling, groping and sweet conversation he can handle.

"I call this place 'the candy shop,' " says Dirk, a burly Dutch advertising executive who spends all his evenings at Night Flight during his frequent visits to Moscow. "There is no place in the world where you can find such a variety of women, so beautiful, so willing."

On any given night, there are at least 10 women for every man in the place. There is no pretense about what they are there for. "I can spend the night with you for \$250," says Tanya, a 23-year-old blonde from the Moscow suburb of Solntsevo. "Or maybe less. Let's talk about it."

Tanya, like most of the women who haunt Night Flight, is not a professional hooker. During the week, she works as a cosmetician in Solntsevo, earning an average Russian salary equivalent to about \$150 per month. She says she can't support her 4-year-old son on that, and she has no one to help her. She bristles at the word "prostitute" but then turns defiant.

"I suppose you can tell me how one goes about living a normal life in this country?" she asks. "As I see it, rich peo-



©1997 KIT BOYCE

ple do what they want, poor people do what they can."

She may have a point. Russia's five-year-old experiment in market economics has hit women the hardest. Once the best-educated and most professionalized part of the Soviet work force, women now make up 80 percent of Russia's unemployment rolls. Experts say most of the scarce new, well-paying jobs opening up in the private sector since the collapse of the U.S.S.R. have been for men only, leaving women with cruelly diminished options.

"Russia has not gone through any revolution in feminist consciousness, and there are few laws or customs to enforce equality in the marketplace," says Yelena Kotchkina, a sociologist with the independent Center for Gender Issues. "Between prostitution and menial labor, there just aren't that many alternatives for women."

Thousands of Russian women follow this logic every year, and move into the expanding international sex trade. There are an estimated 40,000 of them working as strippers, table-dancers and prostitutes in Japan alone. Thousands more work in the sex clubs and strip joints of Israel, Switzerland, Cyprus, Germany and Greece, and they are increasingly turning up in North America as well.

"After oil, I would suspect women are now Russia's biggest hard-currency export," says Kotchkina. "It's not at all what we hoped to find at the end of Communism."

—Fred Weir



# Merger madness in newsweekly biz

An *In These Times* cover story by David Armstrong examined the growing trend of conglomeration among the traditionally scrappy alternative weekly industry ("Alternative, Inc.," November 21, 1995). As Armstrong noted, the company at the forefront of this trend was the Phoenix-based New Times, Inc., which now owns eight city weeklies across the country.

Since that article's publication two years ago, New Times has been surpassed by a rival chain: Stern Publishing, owner of the *Village Voice* and the *L.A. Weekly*. With the launch of its suburban weeklies, the *Long Island Voice* and the *Orange County Weekly*, along with a pair of new acquisitions in Minneapolis and Seattle, Stern now owns seven papers. The company has boosted its total circulation to 750,000 copies a week, a hair above New Times' 743,000.

Both bidding on whatever papers come up for sale, these two companies have sewed up large chunks of the newsweekly market, making it more difficult for established weeklies to compete and for new papers to start up.

Stern Publishing's recent foray into the alternative newsweekly market in the Twin Cities illustrates how corporate chains are knocking out the competition. Leonard Stern, worth an estimated \$920 million, bought both newsweeklies and then folded one.

For 20 years, readers in Minneapolis-St. Paul have enjoyed two newsweeklies: *City Pages* and the *Twin Cities Reader*. *City Pages* had more ads, more pages, a slightly higher circulation and larger revenues. The *Reader*, however, had succeeded in turning around its reputation as the slightly stuffier, more out of touch of the two papers. Under the guidance of Claude Peck, who became editor in April 1995, the *Reader* frequently beat the less newsy *City Pages* to stories.

On February 12, Stern Publishing acquired *City Pages*. A month later, Stern bought the *Reader*, which had been on the auction block for months. The following day, Stern Publishing president and *Village Voice* publisher David Schneiderman told the *Reader*'s staff that the paper was being shut down and asked them to please vacate the offices by the following Friday.

In an industry run increasingly on market share, demographics and personal ads, this kind of merger made perfect business sense. The *Reader* and *City Pages* were unable to carve out distinct market niches; the two papers had roughly the same demographics, circulation and style. The only major difference between the two was profitability. This logic, of course, was little consolation to the *Reader*'s former readership and staff.

The alternative newsweekly industry was founded largely by misfits, peaceniks and angry young men, not good businessmen. But the industry's current economic health—with rising circulations and strong growth in national advertising, even as the circulation of daily papers drops annually—has made the field more attractive to serious business. In the process, the nation's newsweeklies have become less and less distinct from the mass-media publications to which they were supposed to serve as an alternative in the first place.

—Eric Fredericksen

## Contributors

Nicole Nolan is a freelance writer based in Toronto.

Neil deMause is a freelance writer based in New York.

Eric Fredericksen is a senior writer for *The Stranger*, an independent newsweekly in Seattle.

## THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan



©1997 PETER HANNAN

# THE FIRST STONE

## POISON AND PROFITS

By Joel Bleifuss

Since 1991, the Environmental Protection Agency has confronted a basic question as it draws up the much anticipated regulations to control the environmental release of dioxin: Should the agency guard public health and strictly regulate dioxin, one of the most potent man-made poisons? Or, should it protect the bottom line of the corporations that would be adversely affected by any such regulation?

The EPA's regulations, known as the "dioxin reassessment," were released in draft form in September 1994 for public comment. Since then, environmental groups and corporate interests have been trying to influence the EPA's final decision. To that end, the business lobby is funding a slick PR campaign that relies on junk science to get its message across.

Dioxin, a chlorinated hydrocarbon, is formed when chlorine and organic matter are incinerated together and during other industrial processes that use chlorine. Currently, the largest source of dioxin entering the environment is the manufacture and incineration of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic. The ubiquitous PVC is used to make plastic pipes, vinyl house-siding, car interiors, plastic wrap, plastic packaging materials and the coating of copper wires. PVC is also a primary ingredient in disposable medical hardware.

Dioxin is so poisonous that scientists refer to it as a "super toxin." Dioxin is a potent carcinogen, and it mimics natural hormones, wreaking havoc with the reproductive and immune systems. Those most exposed to dioxin are people who live near incinerators, heavy fish eaters and breast-feeding babies. (Human breast milk contains relatively high concentrations of dioxin due to the accumulation of the poison in the body over a woman's life.)

Environmentalists argue that the best way to eliminate the threat posed by dioxin is to stop it from entering the environment in the first place. This could most easily be done by switching from PVC to safer nonchlorinated plastics such as polyethylene terephthalate (PETE), by bleach-

ing paper pulp with processes that do not use chlorine and by tightly regulating incineration as a waste-disposal method. (See "The First Stone," March 6, March 20 and April 3, 1995.) But this approach is at odds with the industry-supported strategy of treating pollution only after it is created.

Rick Hind at Greenpeace's Toxics Campaign in Washington, D.C., likens the public to a frog sitting in a pot of water that is slowly brought to a boil. By perpetually delaying its final regulations on dioxin, and at the same time disclosing information about the planned regulations in dribs and drabs, the EPA and industry have blunted public and media outrage. "The media is so easy to manipulate, the industry people go home laughing," Hind says. "With a little bit of charm and a little

bit of confusion, they can delay for a lifetime. Look what they did for cigarettes. It took 36 years to 'scientifically' prove that smoking caused cancer, which is something that every child knows. And here, with the incineration of PVCs, we have an involuntary smoking program for every person in the industrialized world."

The EPA's draft dioxin reassessment of 1994 identified medical-waste incinerators as one of the largest-known sources of dioxin in the United States. Greenpeace, which has been leading the campaign against industrial uses of chlorine both here and in Europe, recently joined forces with the Washington, D.C.-based Environmental Working Group and other organizations to form Health Care Without Harm. This coalition effort aims to pressure health care providers to switch to disposable items made from plastics that do not contain chlorinated hydrocarbons as a key ingredient.

Health Care Without Harm convinced the American Public Health Association to pass a resolution at its November 1996 annual meeting urging "all health care facilities to explore ways to reduce or eliminate their use of PVC plastics." The APHA's resolution handed the chemical industry one of the few defeats in its public-relations campaign to cover up the dangers of dioxin.

In 1994, the Vinyl Institute, the trade association of the PVC industry, hired the public-relations company N-D Communications of Washington, D.C. The firm came up with "Crisis Communications Protocol of the Vinyl Institute," a detailed plan "to protect PVC in the marketplace." Obtained by Greenpeace from court documents, the protocol explains that the PVC industry's long-term goal is "to avoid deselection of PVC by major customers, and to prevent punitive regulation of PVC by EPA, Congress or the state legislatures." Its short-term objective is to counteract media criticism "by positioning the vinyl industry as a proactive and cooperative entity, working in tandem with EPA." Yet cooperation goes only so far. The report advises



the Vinyl Institute to “aggressively defend the industry’s credibility through the use of third-party sources to debunk Greenpeace’s—or even EPA’s—misleading claims.” Such a defense would include “unleashing a number of third-party scientists to attack Greenpeace’s science and allegations.”

One such scientist is Dr. Gregory Rigo, of Rigo & Rigo Associates, a scientific consulting firm based in Cleveland, Ohio. In an August 22, 1994 memo, which was leaked to Greenpeace, Don Goodman, an executive with OxyChem (a major PVC manufacturer), explained that the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) suggested that the Vinyl Institute pay Rigo & Rigo to do a study on incineration of dioxin, which ASME would officially sponsor. “The purpose of ASME as the contractor is to provide unassailable objectivity to the study,” Goodman wrote.

According to the memo, the task force interviewed Rigo and found him to be their kind of scientist. Goodman went on to say that Rigo is “user-friendly (i.e., willing to set his priorities to our needs) and appears to be sympathetic to Plastics, Vinyl, PVE and Cl.” Goodman noted that the Vinyl Institute would pay Rigo \$130,000, as negotiated by ASME, to do the study. Finally, Goodman explained that “an additional \$20,000 as a contingency fund” would be needed since the Vinyl Institute “may want to use Greg Rigo as an expert witness or advocate to talk about the report.” Apparently, “user-friendly” scientists don’t come cheap.

Rigo’s study, published in 1995, concluded that there is no correlation between the amount of PVC burned in an incinerator and the amount of dioxin produced by the incinerator. Greenpeace scientist Pat Costner dissected the Rigo report, and concluded that Rigo “used inappropriate and/or unreliable” ways of measuring “chlorine inputs and dioxin outputs,” and that, consequently, Rigo’s conclusions are invalid. Further, according to Costner, “there appear to be striking discrepancies between the authors’ conclusions and the statistical findings presented in their report.”

Nonetheless, the Rigo study has done what the Vinyl Institute hoped it would: help derail efforts to control the environmental release of dioxin around the globe. A 1996 report by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency cited the Rigo report when it concluded “a reduction in the PVC content of waste will not change the amount of emissions from dioxins in glue gases from waste-incineration plants in Sweden.”

At a preliminary meeting in Canberra, Australia, held in March 1996 to establish a global treaty that would deal

with persistent organic pollutants like dioxin, the Vinyl Institute distributed the Rigo report along with a press release explaining that the report underscored “the positive environmental performance of the vinyl-production process and of vinyl products throughout their life cycle.”

During a public debate last October in Spain about the dangers of municipal incinerators, the New York-based PR firm Burson-Martsteller distributed a document that cited “a recent study promoted by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers in the U.S.A.” which found “there is no relation between production of dioxins in municipal-waste incinerators and PVC content of waste.”

Even the EPA flacked for industry. In August 1996, the agency sent James Kilgore, of the EPA’s Office of Research and Development, to the 16th annual Dioxin ’96 Conference

in Amsterdam. At the conference, Kilgore presented the Rigo report, passing it off as an independent ASME review that had been approved and endorsed by the EPA. He did not mention that the research was made to order for Vinyl Institute, nor the fact that he was one of the scientists who participated in a peer review of the Rigo report.

At the EPA’s National Center for Environmental Assessment, David Cleverley has been working on the dioxin reassessment. He is closely following the controversy over the Rigo report. “It’s interesting,” he says.

“Greenpeace went and used the same data [as Rigo], and came up with different observations. Currently we are evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of both the Rigo approach and the Greenpeace approach to determine what can be said about the role of [PVC] fed into a combustion process.” But, Cleverley notes, in controlled laboratory experiments, “there is a very strong correlation” between the amount of PVC burned and the amount of dioxin created.

Others at the EPA, who are not involved in the dioxin reassessment, are appalled by the ease with which the Rigo report has been accepted as sound science. On April 2, William Sanjour, a 25-year agency veteran, sent a letter to EPA Administrator Carol Browner, informing her of Kilgore’s talk in Amsterdam endorsing the Vinyl Institute report, which he describes as a “serious breach of government ethical standards.” Sanjour went on to say that Kilgore’s trip to Amsterdam raises a second, overriding ethical question: “the ease with which the EPA accepts self-serving industry-sponsored ‘research’ as the basis of its regulations.”



**WELFARE**

# Corporate caseworkers

*The 1996 welfare law has opened up a raft of new opportunities for private companies like Lockheed Martin.*

By Adam Fiffeld

**I**n Los Angeles, deadbeat dads no longer answer to the government. Instead, they find themselves monitored by the Lockheed Martin Corp., the nation's largest defense contractor. Under a four-year, \$50 million contract, the giant multinational corporation tracks them, summons them for informal hearings, and even draws their blood for tests.

Lockheed Martin is not the only big corporation that sees an opportunity to make a tidy profit delivering social services that once were the responsibility of public-sector employees. As the federal government abandons the welfare business, private companies like Lockheed are landing government contracts throughout the country to provide services ranging from child-support collection to the administration of Medicaid.

"We're at a time when programs that provide subsistence benefits to the poorest people are being cut

back, and at the same time, we're talking about spending some of those precious dollars to generate profits for shareholders of large corporations," says Henry Freedman, executive director of the Manhattan-based Welfare Law Center.

No state has welcomed private companies into the welfare arena as enthusiastically as Texas. Several for-profit companies, including Lockheed, Electronic Data Systems and Andersen Consulting, have submitted bids on a \$2 billion multi-year contract to administer the state's screening process for recipients of Medicaid, food stamps and welfare, to computerize its welfare system and to integrate the delivery of various benefits into "one-stop shopping" centers throughout the state.

The plan, dubbed the Texas Integrated Enrollment Service (TIES), was passed into law in 1995 with bipartisan support. As many as 5,000 state public sector workers may lose their jobs, while public control over vital, dwindling services to the poor has

been put in jeopardy.

Texas is the latest and perhaps boldest example of corporate America's attempts to cash in on welfare reform. "The country is looking at Texas. What we get away with, they're gonna do," says Gene Freeland, a labor representative at the Texas Workforce Commission, a state job-training agency created in 1995 by consolidating the state's 28 different job-training programs, now called local workforce districts.

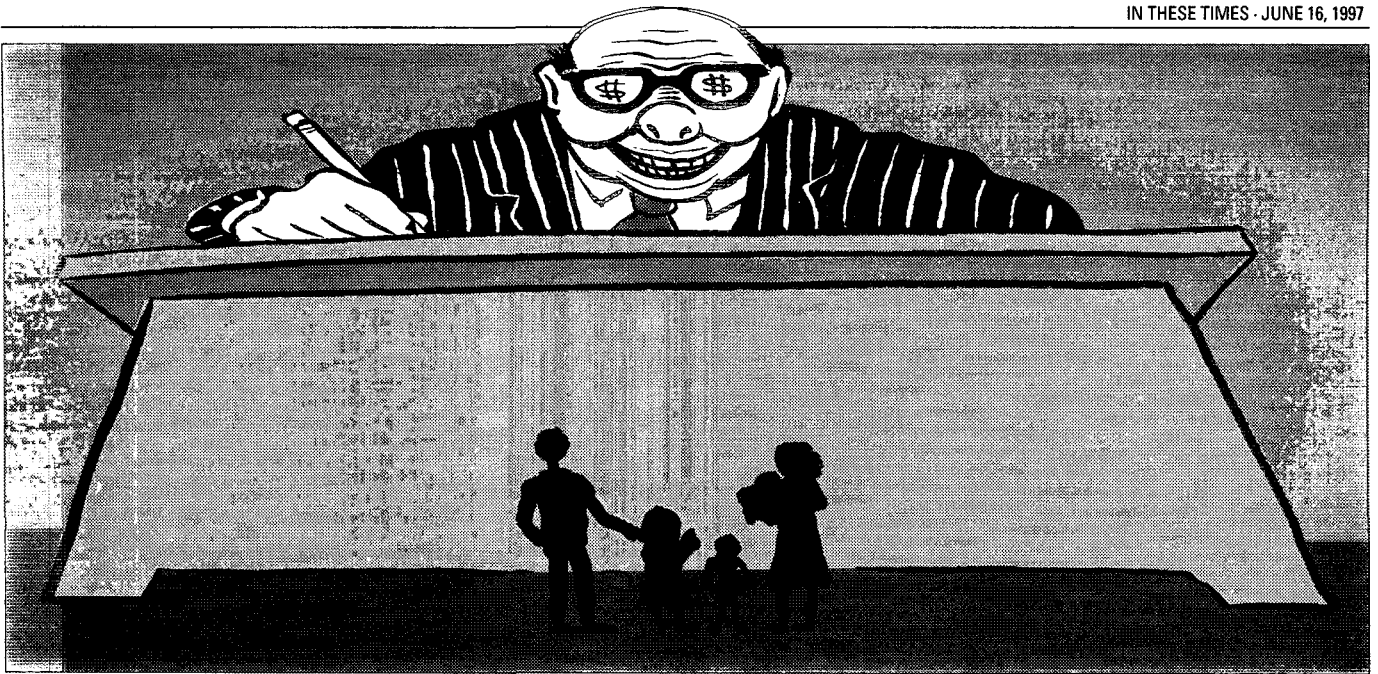
The 1996 federal welfare law, which replaces much of the current welfare system with block grants to the states, has created a raft of new business opportunities for private companies who are vying for these funds by promising to reduce welfare rolls, place welfare recipients in jobs, streamline services and eliminate public-sector jobs. Under the new law, states are allowed to keep federal welfare dollars they don't spend. The fewer people served, the larger the savings. In essence, the state is hiring private companies to pull the switch and purge the rolls.

"The private companies want to get all the funding streams for moving people off welfare and into jobs," says Debbie Goldman, a research economist at the Communication Workers of America. "They want to be the labor department and the welfare department."

At a March 1997 conference in Washington, D.C., entitled "Welfare Privatization: Government Savings and Private Earnings," sponsored by the Manhattan-based World Research Group, nearly 100 state welfare officials and representatives from private companies exchanged business cards and discussed future "public-private partnerships." Host Bill Eggers, the director of the conservative, Los Angeles-based Reason Foundation, opened the conference with the declaration that welfare "is one of the hottest areas for privatization in the country right now, if not the hottest."



©1997 KIT BOYCE



Many states have already privatized certain welfare services. According to a recent industry survey by Andersen Consulting, private companies have contracts to perform welfare functions in 49 states. Contracts currently held or up for bid cover a range of services, including the screening of welfare applicants, administration of benefits, welfare-fraud investigations, automation of information systems, and job training and placement.

The largest player in welfare privatization is Lockheed Martin, a \$30 billion corporate giant. Lockheed Martin Information Management Systems Corp. (IMS), the company's branch specializing in social services, parking and transportation, has contracts in 45 states. The company is an "agent of the state" in 33 jurisdictions throughout the country, providing children and family services under contract. It collects delinquent child-support payments in 30 states, pocketing 19 cents on every dollar of the \$1.15 billion it recovers annually. To bolster its credibility, the company has hired the best and brightest from the public welfare field. Last fall, for instance, it appointed Gerald Miller, former director of the Michigan Family Independence Agency and president of the American Public Welfare League, as senior vice president of its "welfare initiatives" division.

Lockheed has already won one victory in Texas. In April, the state awarded Lockheed a \$2.5 million contract to provide job training and placement services to welfare recipients and to determine eligibility for food-stamp applicants. In late April, as a result of the contract, 92 state employees were told they would be terminated but that they could reapply with Lockheed. The state's other localities "will be looking at Dallas and [will] know that it will be acceptable to lay off these people," says Freeland from the Texas Workforce Commission. He predicts that as Lockheed replaces state workers with its own inexperienced workers, "there will be a lot of mistakes."

For-profits are expected to swiftly corner this new mar-

ket. Companies like Lockheed can easily outbid nonprofits for the same contracts. At the Washington conference on welfare privatization, Rex Davidson, executive director of the nonprofit Goodwill Industries of Greater New York, notes, "we don't have the resources to handle a billion-dollar contract. For-profits can legally make political contributions. Nonprofits can't." In the 1995-96 election cycle, Lockheed contributed a total of \$1.3 million to candidates for public office.

For-profits are also able to hire armies of well-paid lobbyists. For example, on any given day, there are between 30 and 40 Lockheed lobbyists in the Texas state legislature, according to state union organizers.

Corporations expand their influence with state governments by hiring high-ranking state officials. Seven former Texas state officials have ended up on Lockheed's payroll. For example, Dan Shelley was Texas Gov. George W. Bush's legislative liaison from early 1994 until this January and a strong advocate for the passage of the privatization legislation; today, he lobbies for Lockheed. Greg Hartman pushed privatization measures as director of communications for the Texas comptroller from 1990 until 1996; today, he assists Lockheed and IBM in preparing bids. The Texas State Employees Union is calling for an ethics investigation into the company's curious hiring patterns.

Unions, nonprofits and advocates for the poor argue that welfare privatization is really a fig leaf for further cutbacks. "A lot of the privatization is sold on the grounds of efficiency," says Freedman from the Welfare Law Center. "But a lot of the savings come on the grounds of a reduction of services."

Many fear that the drive to privatize means that serving the poor will take a backseat to serving the bottom line. To which Lockheed's Gerald Miller retorts: "This has nothing to do with profit—it has to do with performance."

But a look at the contract histories of the major for-profit players shows a pattern of incompetence, cost overruns and

broken promises—a pattern that deflates the hype that private businesses are always more efficient and cost-effective than government service-providers. In a recent survey of child-support systems contracted out to private companies, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that private contractors in 27 states failed to deliver the services they had promised.

In early May, the *Sacramento Bee* reported that Lockheed's \$260 million computer system for tracking deadbeat parents for the state of California was on the "verge of failure." The state ceased making payments to Lockheed in February, and said it would resume them only if the company could prove that its system works.

In April, Ross Perot's Electronic Data Systems (EDS) lost its contract with the state of Virginia to manage Medicaid payments, after state officials complained that the \$12 billion company was 20 months behind schedule in implementing its new system. In 1995, the Florida Attorney General attempted unsuccessfully to bar EDS from doing business with the state, after state officials contended that its \$240 million computer system designed to manage welfare benefits and child-support payments was "grossly inefficient."

Maximus Inc., which has contracts with 28 states including a brand new job-training and placement contract with Milwaukee County in Wisconsin, has an equally wobbly record. In the fall of 1996, the company lost its contract with the state of Nebraska after state officials testified at a public hearing that the company had failed to live up to 90 percent of its duties in managing the state's Medicaid system. In 1993 in Arizona, errors made by Maximus while entering information into the state's computer system resulted in the wrongful withholding of tax refunds from citizens who did not owe child-support payments.

The privatization juggernaut hit a pothole this May when President Clinton handed down a federal decision essentially

barring certain elements of Texas's privatization plan. The decision, an interpretation of the federal Social Security and food stamp acts, stipulated that the authority to determine eligibility for Medicaid and food stamps must remain in government hands, since both of these programs remain federal entitlements. However, the government gave the go-ahead to Texas to privatize the screening of applicants for basic welfare and to automate the state's welfare system.

**P**roponents of privatization argue that Clinton's decision was a payback to public-sector unions, who supported him in the election. "The administration boldly proclaimed, we will let the states be free to exercise their best judgment on delivering compassionate welfare," said Texas Gov. Bush, an ardent supporter of welfare privatization. "But, on this issue, when they recognize the external politics, the union politics, they crater."

Bush, a potential aspirant for the U.S. presidency, won't let anything—least of all a federal decision—get in his way. He sent a letter to the White House vowing that Texas will press ahead in a "different way" in its drive to privatize welfare and other services. He proposes transferring some of the authority to determine eligibility for benefits to the Republican-controlled Texas Workforce Commission. The commission's 28 local workforce districts would then contract this responsibility out to private companies, according to Hugh Strange, spokesman for Texas state Rep. Glen Maxey, a Democrat who has opposed the privatization effort. "Theoretically, a state agency would still be in control, but the local boards could let out the contracts," says Strange.

Privatization opponents say they wouldn't be surprised if Bush flouts Clinton's decision and sticks to his original plan. "In my opinion, the administration is going to ignore it," says Freeland from the Texas Workforce Commission.

Corporate interests and their Republican supporters hope to persuade Clinton to change his mind. Texas's Republican congressional caucus, including House Majority leader Dick Armey, Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer and Sens. Phil Gramm and Kay Bailey Hutchinson, met with White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles on May 21 to urge a reversal of Clinton's decision. The next day, Archer and Armey introduced what was called the Welfare Flexibility Act, with 14 co-sponsors, which would allow nongovernmental employees to determine eligibility.

Union officials and advocates across the country predict that the companies bidding on the Texas project will become more aggressive in the coming months in their attempt to overturn Clinton's decision or find a way around it. "These companies are going to be all over Congress to get the [ruling] changed," says Goldman from the Communication Workers of America. "We haven't seen the end of this." Now that they have snagged such a choice piece of the welfare business, private companies will not give it up without a fight. ◀

**Adam Fifield** is a freelance writer based in New York. His last article for *In These Times*, "Will Cambodia's killers be tried?" appeared in the Dec. 23, 1996, issue.

## Checked your

# LIBIDO

## lately?

### You should.

### 4 issues/ \$30\*

### 800-495-1988

\*U.S. price only. Curious enough to give it a chance and see what develops?

One issue/\$8.

Or look for us on the web:  
[www.indra.com/libido](http://www.indra.com/libido)







# Let them eat cake

*The battle is on  
for the future  
of France's  
vaunted model  
of social  
protection.*

By James Cohen  
PARIS, FRANCE

In late April, French public attention was focused on the National Assembly, where legislators were debating a bill to help the poor. With its bill on "social cohesion," the governing right wanted to prove once and for all that it had something tangible to offer in the struggle against growing poverty and exclusion, just as President Jacques Chirac had long promised.

In its original form, the bill involved a few modest measures such as registering the homeless to vote and giving poor people more access to low-rent housing. Trying to give the bill more substance, lawmakers from both the left and the right proposed literally hundreds of amendments while unemployed people and advocates of the poor looked on hopefully from the gallery.

Everyone, even the bill's sponsors, was taken by surprise by Chirac's April 21

call for early parliamentary elections. With the dissolution of the National Assembly, debate on the bill—supposedly of such great symbolic importance to the president—was unceremoniously shut down.

The bill may return to the Assembly floor after elections in early June, when a new government is formed. At best, its impact will be limited, since it is not designed to grapple with the very mechanisms, particularly stagnation and diminishing job security, that produce poverty and exclusion. What is striking is that the social question in France is being defined once again, as it was in the 19th century, in terms of alleviating poverty rather than reinforcing the existing social rights of all citizens.

While poverty and long-term unemployment have been growing since the '80s, the French welfare state continues to be a solid rampart against insecurity for those with stable jobs. However, the system of social protection is beginning to come under the knife, and parts of it are being prepared for privatization. The battle is on for the future of the French social model.

The right promises fervently to protect the threatened edifice, but its idea of protection is conditioned by the ferocious logic of the bottom line and by the dogma of labor flexibility. Since its formation in 1995, the government of Prime Minister Alain Juppé has steadily lost support because of the widespread perception that its determination to cut the deficit takes precedence over all else. A series of austerity measures affecting public-sector workers provoked a prolonged and massive strike in November and December of 1995. Juppé has continued since then to project the image of a heartless technocrat who pursues budget-balancing as a mania, not as a way of assuring a more secure future. After leading his conservative coalition to a rout in the first round of voting on May 25, he stepped down as premier two days later.

The Socialist Party, now led by Lionel Jospin, talks a more radical game, claiming to oppose the right's "harsh capitalism." But its program—and its actual performance in government (1981-86, 1988-93)—indicate that its strategy is not very different from the right's.

One of the main reasons why Juppé and his team were so budget-obsessed—and why the Socialist Party has not taken a more radical stance—is the Maastricht Treaty, the guiding document for the current stage of construction of the European Union since 1993. The treaty calls for all states seeking to adopt the single European currency (known as the "Euro") to reduce their budget deficits to below 3 percent of the Gross Domestic Product by 1999, among other "harmonization" measures.

Of the larger states in the European Union, France comes closest to qualifying, but its deficit still hovers between 3 per-

cent and 4 percent, with a tendency to drift toward the latter, stirring panic among those driven by numbers. Juppé called for drastic measures to be taken quickly. In fact, elections were called early in order to give the conservatives a popular mandate for a new round of austerity—provided they win, which is not altogether certain as we go to press.

The French welfare state includes a wide variety of programs in the areas of health care, child-care, paid leaves and vacations, retirement benefits, unemployment compensation, low-rent housing, aid to families and, since 1989, a guaranteed income for those in real need. The system is remarkably comprehensive, especially by U.S. standards. It is inconceivable, for example, for a family to be ruined by the serious illness of one of its members. Pregnant women have six months of paid leave, and wage earners are usually entitled to four to five weeks of vacation each year. Taken as a whole, these different programs are conceived to give the state a strong role in holding together the social fabric. In the tradition of the French revolution (“liberty, equality, fraternity”), citizens view social cohesion—or solidarity—as essential to a modern democratic system.

Politicians across the political spectrum believe citizens have a legitimate claim on these programs. Only the extreme-right National Front, led by Jean-Marie Le Pen, rails steadily about cutting off social benefits to an entire sector of the population—immigrants. In general, however, it is very bad politics to advocate reducing social protection.

France’s public-sector workers, in particular the more than two million civil servants known as *fonctionnaires*, have the most complete package of benefits. However, private-sector companies are also required to pay into the government’s social-protection funds and thereby guarantee their workers’ health, retirement, maternity and unemployment benefits.

The bellwether program of social protection is the national health care plan known as social security, created in 1946. It is basically a state-guaranteed insurance fund (in fact, a patchwork of funds) into which workers and employers pay in exchange for health care benefits. Medical expenses are reimbursed at rates up to 70 percent, depending on the type of product or service. (Dental care and eyeglasses are notorious for their low rates of reimbursement.)

Contrary to the image that many Americans have of

“socialized medicine” resulting in mediocre care and limited consumer choice, French social security—known affectionately as *la sécu*—operates to the general satisfaction of most citizens, while giving full leeway to doctors who wish to pursue private practices and charge higher fees.

Since the early ’90s, however, the program’s deficit has risen continually, reaching 54.2 billion francs (about \$9.5 billion) in 1996. Social-protection funds as a whole were 300 billion francs (roughly \$52 billion) in the red.

Both the left and the right, when in power, have confronted the problem in the same ways: by raising taxes, creating new ones, and transferring an increasing part of the funding of the program from taxes withheld from wages to a supplementary income tax known as the “Generalized Social Contribution.” Never-

theless, benefits are visibly eroding. Medicine and doctors’ visits are less generously reimbursed than before, while funding for public hospitals has recently been cut sharply, provoking the ire of doctors and interns.

Another key feature of French-style social protection is the state-guaranteed retirement program. Here too, deficits are causing concern. By most predictions, retirees will soon be too numerous to be supported by the contributions of active workers, who in turn risk receiving less benefits when they retire. As in the United States, the chief proposal for tackling this problem involves privatization. In February, a new law bearing the name of conservative deputy Jean-Pierre Thomas opened the way for employers to opt out of the state system and set up private funds. Within several years, retirement funds will come under the control of large private financial interests and thus undercut the system of publicly guaranteed social protection.

On the retirement front, a militant strike in December 1996 resulted in a victory for truck drivers: They may now retire at age 55 instead of 60. After two weeks of blocked highways, the government could not say no to the drivers, but authorities are horrified at the idea of extending this measure to other categories of workers. Striking municipal transport employees made the same demand in Toulouse, Marseilles and several other cities in February, but the government held firm against them.

Public housing, another major feature of the French wel-



©1997 KIT BOYCE

fare state, is also in growing jeopardy. About a quarter of France's 58 million inhabitants live in state-sponsored low-rent housing. Many of them belong to the poorest strata of the population. This housing is becoming less and less affordable, however. Between 1984 and 1992, rents rose by 71 percent, outstripping the 27 percent rise in incomes. In the meantime, France's thousand or so local public-housing authorities are in debt to the tune of about 450 billion francs (about \$80 billion). In their efforts to economize, these authorities often end up penalizing those least able to pay. For instance, management tends more and more to screen new tenants for solvency and to jack up fines for rent delinquency. Housing authorities in Socialist- and Communist-run municipalities have tried to avoid these kinds of measures, but it has not been an easy feat.

French social protection enjoyed smooth sailing as long as relatively full employment prevailed and most unemployed workers spent only a few weeks looking for a new job. With more and more workers staying on unemployment until their benefits run out, hundreds of thousands since the mid-'70s have slipped into the ranks of the "new poor." For those truly in distress, the socialist government of Michel Rocard instituted in 1989 a "minimum income of insertion," or RMI—a modest guaranteed income offered to those without any other resources, provided that they actively seek employment. In practice, few recipients have many job prospects. Nonetheless, there is now a consensus on the left and right that the RMI is an indispensable weapon against dire poverty.

Double-digit unemployment—now officially at 12.8 percent, and much higher according to some economists—has become a permanent feature of the French landscape. To remedy this problem, both the right and left have expressed interest in plans to reduce the workweek, but certain methods for reaching this goal are more congenial to workers' interests than others. Current schemes to reduce labor time are designed in the interests of employers. Such schemes usually result in imposed part-time labor with lower wages and benefits. A recent law bearing the name of conservative legislator Gilles de Robien facilitates this approach by allowing employers to reduce their contributions to the social-protection funds as an incentive to hire new workers.

In a recent survey, French economist Pascal Riché found that 30 percent of part-time workers would prefer to return to full-time work if they could. Nonetheless, conservatives have expressed satisfaction with the Robien law's approach. The Socialist Party promises, if elected, to initiate a more vigorous process aimed at reducing the workweek to 35 hours through arbitrated negotiation between labor and management. The 35-hour plank, however, has been in the Socialists' program since 1985 without any significant progress made on the issue.

It is not clear, in any case, how even a bold move on this front would contribute to greater job security. For young wage earners, employment contracts usually only cover six

months to a year. In the public sector, thousands of career civil-service positions are rapidly being replaced with more "flexible" categories of personnel who can be hired and fired at will.

Governments of the right and left have repeatedly vowed, since the '70s, to make employment their crusade. There is a consensus on the importance of education, training and giving real opportunities to youth entering the job market. In most cases, however, youth are offered quick-fix solutions such as temporary training programs. These usually last a year or less and keep young candidates scrambling for real openings, while actually rewarding employers by granting them exemptions on their social-protection fund contributions.

For the right, lowering employers' contributions is a key strategy for stimulating employment. Market forces are expected to do the rest. The Socialist Party, in its current electoral program, espouses creating, over a five-year period, 700,000 stable jobs, half of which would be in the public sector. Even if successful, however, such a policy would reduce unemployment—now at 3.6 million—by barely a quarter.

Polls reveal that many French citizens are disillusioned about the capacity of any government, left or right, to restore social benefits and make a difference in the battle against unemployment. This sentiment has created an opening for more radical groupings on the left—among them, anti-Maastricht socialists, the Communist Party, the Greens and Trotskyists—who together scored almost 20 percent in the first round of parliamentary balloting. At the same time, the National Front held its ground at just over 15 percent, benefiting in its own way from growing socioeconomic distress.

One thing is plain to all: France's vaunted system of social protection has begun to unravel. For the left, it is clear that unbridled market forces are not the best way to save it. But that's what French voters will decide when they go to the polls on June 1 to choose a successor to Alain Juppé's shipwrecked conservative government.

James Cohen teaches political science at the University of Paris-VIII (Saint-Denis) and the Institut d'Etudes Politiques of Paris. His last article for *In These Times* was "French Communists on the Rebound," in the March 3, 1997, issue.



## The Progressive POPULIST

*A Monthly Journal from the Heartland*

News and views from the Heartland with Jim Hightower, Ralph Nader, Jesse Jackson, Eugene McCarthy, Molly Ivins, Norman Solomon, other plutocrat-pluckers and the best of the alternative press. Your antidote to the daily news.

Finalist, Utne Reader's Best New Title of 1995. 12 issues \$18.

For a FREE sample Call toll-free 1-800-205-7067



**H O U S I N G**

# Revolt of the haves

**N**ot satisfied with gutting federal programs, the Republican right has taken the fight against affordable housing to the states.

The first big battleground was in Massachusetts, where a 1994 referendum led the state to abolish rent controls that had flourished for more than two decades in Boston, Brookline and Cambridge. In 1995, the fight surfaced on the West Coast, as the California state legislature effectively ended rent controls. This year, the conflict has come to New York, where a Republican majority in Albany is attempting to eviscerate rent regulations for 1.2 million tenants in New York City and Nassau, Rockland and Westchester counties.

None of these battles has focused on the merits and shortcomings of the rent laws. Instead, notes Peter Dreier, director of the public policy program at

Occidental College in Los Angeles, they have been fueled principally by money. "Most of it's just about juice," says Dreier, a veteran of the housing wars from the 10 years he spent as director of housing for former Boston Mayor Ray Flynn. "In simple terms, the battle between tenants and landlords can be viewed as a contest between organized people and organized money, and the real estate industry has a shitload of money." In Massachusetts, he points out, landlords forked out \$1.1 million in their successful campaign to end rent laws, while tenants could only muster \$150,000.

The results have been stunning. One year after decontrol, rents in Boston jumped 14 percent. In San Francisco, rents increased a whopping 24 percent in the first year after decontrol. New Yorkers, some studies suggest, could face rent hikes of as much as 50 percent within two years after the end of regulations. The impact, in other words, will be felt for many years to come. "If you're looking for blood in the streets, you're not going

to see it," Dreier says. "It's going to be a long slow ulcer."

The New York City landlords' deep pockets have enabled them to control the terms of the debate. Using a savvy advertising and public-relations campaign, they have cultivated the myth that many rent-regulated tenants are wealthy (see sidebar, page 22). The facts, however, show the opposite. In New York City, three-quarters of the tenants in rent-regulated apartments—almost 800,000 families—earn less than \$50,000 a year, and more than half of the city's rent-regulated tenants are immigrants. By contrast, just one percent of the tenants in regulated units earn more than \$200,000 annually.

In truth, says José Pérez, supervising attorney of the Hofstra University Housing Rights Clinic, many rent-regulated tenants on Long Island are immigrants from South and Central America. "It's the exact opposite of what the landlords say," says Pérez. "If it wasn't for rent regulations, many of these recent immigrants couldn't afford to live here. They're the people who, when the rent regulations go out, are the most vulnerable. And they're the ones who are going to be the hardest hit."

New York's landlords have long been the sworn enemies of the rent-control system. And 1997, they say, will be the year of decision. "This is the year," crows Joseph Strasburg, head of the Rent Stabilization Association, a landlord lobbying group. Though he grew up in a rent-controlled apartment in the Bronx, Strasburg is delighted at the prospect that rent regulations may be dismantled and argues that the city will benefit from the change.

What makes Strasburg so confident is the new political constellation in New York state. (In New York, Massachusetts and California, rent-regulation battles are

*State by state,  
Republican  
legislators are  
waging war on  
rent controls.*

By Robert Neuwirth



Response of the have-nots.

statewide fights because local rent laws require state enabling legislation.) New York, long a Democratic bastion, is now dominated by Republicans. In Rudolph Giuliani, the city has its first Republican mayor in a generation. George Pataki, who deposed Mario Cuomo, is the state's first Republican governor in two decades. And, though the state Senate has long been controlled by the GOP, it has a new, hardline leader in Joseph Bruno, a right-wing millionaire from upstate Rensselaer County. Prodded in part by massive contributions from the real estate industry (approximately \$1.5 million went into state Republican coffers over the past five years), Bruno has made axing the rent laws one of his main objectives. In fact, he can achieve this goal by doing absolutely nothing: The state's rent laws have never been made permanent, and they are up for renewal this year. If they are not officially extended, they will expire in mid-June.

Tenant leaders are bracing for the worst. They believe that the landlords are out for blood. "I think there's a 50 percent chance that the laws will sunset on June 15," says Michael McKee, one of the founders of the New York State Tenants and Neighbors Coalition, the city's main tenant lobbying group.

Even the most dogged supporters of New York's rent laws acknowledge that they are maddeningly complex. The history of rent regulations in New York goes back to the '20s, but the first official rent-control law was put in place during World War II, when little new housing was being built. In New York, there are still 71,000 apartments that are subject to these 50-year-old controls. Apartments in buildings erected between 1947 and 1974 and formerly rent-controlled units in older buildings that have been vacated and re-rented since 1971 fall under a parallel but looser system called rent stabilization. This system now encompasses more than 1 million units. Because of this patchwork of laws, rents for identical apartments in the same building can vary immensely, depending on how often they were vacated and what improvements the landlord put into the building.

Rent controls do not freeze rents. Instead, they limit the amount that landlords can raise their rents each year and when apartments become vacant. Last year, the city's Rent Guidelines Board limited increases to 5 percent on a one-year lease and 7 percent on a two-year lease. The increases

can mount over time. For example, when Angelica Rosado moved in to her rent-regulated two-bedroom apartment in Flushing, Queens 16 years ago, she paid \$350 a month. Today, her rent is \$976—a 280 percent hike. That astronomical increase—four times the inflation rate—was totally legal, a product of the city's rent-stabilization system.

Rent-regulation laws also give tenants security in their homes. Without regulations, a landlord can refuse to renew a tenant's lease when it expires—and thus can, in effect, evict a tenant without any reason. Under New York's rent laws, except for some very clear and limited cases, landlords must offer tenants the chance to renew their lease. This, tenant leaders say, helps build strong and diverse neighborhoods.

In New York state, rent laws apply to localities where the legislature has determined there is a housing emergency—defined as a vacancy rate below 5 percent. (The vacancy rate in New York City was 4.1 percent last year.) With so few apartments available and so many people looking, tenants are often forced to pay exorbitant prices—or they lose their homes.

Landlords have long denounced rent regulation as bad urban policy and left-wing extremism. “We live in an age when Moscow and Beijing and, for heaven's sake, Ho Chi Minh City are removing rent controls,” snaps Daniel Rose,

a builder and developer. He claims that rent regulations are a subsidy to tenants at the expense of landlords, that they distort the market and make it impossible for building owners to make money. Landlords also assert that rent regulations create abandonment and deter new construction.

Each of these arguments turns out to be misleading. For instance, on the issue of landlord profit, a recent study by the city's Rent Guidelines Board demonstrates that landlords are making money at healthy levels. The average stabilized apartment today rents for \$600 a month, but only costs \$370 to maintain. This means that almost 40 percent of that average rent—\$230 per apartment per month—is profit. In addition, New York Public Advocate Mark Green has determined that rents in the city have risen at a much steeper rate than costs. Since 1975, his research shows, regulated rents have gone up 210 percent, while maintenance and operating expenses have only increased by 143 percent. Local real estate industry sources do not dispute these figures, though they note that the numbers do not include debt service—the amount an owner must pay on a mortgage.

The argument about abandonment fails, too. With or without rent controls, most major U.S. cities grappled with abandonment throughout the '70s and '80s. In fact, the evidence seems to indicate rent regulations actually ameliorate the problem. New York and other rent-regulated cities have significantly lower numbers of boarded-up buildings than free-market cities. For instance, the percentage of New York's apartments that are boarded up is minuscule—a mere 0.14 percent of the city's housing units, according to the 1990 census. By comparison, in unregulated Texas, cities like Houston, Dallas and Fort Worth all have abandonment rates almost seven times higher than New York's.

Finally, the claim about new construction is a complete myth. In New York, apartment houses erected since 1974 are immune from the rent laws unless they were aided by government subsidies or tax deals. New York today has more than 575,000 units that are not subject to any rent regulations—28.4 percent of the city's housing stock.

So, if many of the arguments about rent controls are misleading or simply wrong, what's the fight really about? Naked greed, says John Gilderbloom, a professor at the University of Louisville who has written widely about the economic

## The PR war

**I**f Mia Farrow is the poster child of the landlords, Carlos Mackey should be the poster child of the tenants.

Farrow is the kind of person the landlord lobby points to in New York's debate over rent regulations. Until recently, the movie star lived in an 11-room rent-stabilized apartment overlooking Central Park that rented for approximately \$2,900 a month. Farrow's landlord claimed that her apartment was worth around \$8,000 per month. She only moved after 1993, when the state passed a rider that deregulated luxury apartments that rented for more than \$2,000 a month or where tenants earned more than \$250,000 a year.

Over the past few years, landlords have run a slick advertising and media campaign, using wealthy renters like Farrow to support their claim that New York's rent-regulated tenants are just a bunch of rich people who want to hold onto cheap apartments. In Massachusetts, landlords employed a similar strategy when they publicized the fact that the mayor of Cambridge had a rent-controlled apartment. Though the mayor's salary was not particularly high, the revelation made it seem that he was profiteering.

Carlos Mackey, on the other hand, is a U.S. Army veteran who earned a purple heart for his service in the Korean War. He has lived in the village of Hempstead, on Long Island, for 40 years. Now 71, he survives on Social Security, veterans' benefits, and a small stipend from his part-time job at the nonprofit Hempstead Hispanic Civic Association. He has lived in his one-bedroom rent-regulated apartment for 15 years. The buzzer system in his 62-unit building is broken, and there's no lock on the front door. Maintenance, he reports, has always been a problem. Nonetheless, Mackey pays 40 percent of his income—\$706.41 a month—in rent.

Timothy Collins, an attorney in New York City who has worked on housing issues both inside and outside of government, says that by moving the focus from rent gouging by landlords to profiteering by rich tenants, landlords have captured the debate. “We're dealing essentially with a public-relations coup,” he says. —R.N.



benefits of rent regulations. "If rent regulations are ended, it will create the largest redistribution of wealth to hit New York since possibly the great Depression," he says. To Gilderbloom, the economics are simple: If rent regulations are lifted, landlords will be able to get more money for their apartments—and that will mean that millions of tenants in New York will have less money for food, clothing and other necessities.

Under increasingly blistering criticism from tenants, New York Gov. George Pataki recently introduced a new proposal that he terms a compromise. Pataki suggests ending rent regulations gradually, as individual tenants move out. This proposal, which is similar to what was passed in California, is known as vacancy decontrol. But tenants don't view it as a compromise—they claim it's a sell-out. "Pataki wants to end rent regulations by the back door," charges Bill Rowen, political action coordinator for the Metropolitan Council on Housing. Rowen points out that the state dabbled with vacancy decontrol during the early '70s, and the experience was a disaster. A state legislative committee documented average rent increases of 51 percent and a huge jump in the number of evictions. Ultimately, the state, which started the vacancy program in 1971, was forced to end it just two years later.

Pataki asserts that he wants to boost the penalties against landlords who harass tenants. But tenant activists say that this is essentially meaningless since criminal harassment is extremely difficult to prove. For instance, many landlords harass tenants by repeatedly sending eviction notices or delaying making minor repairs, but these actions would not constitute criminal harassment.

Carlos Mackey, a tenant leader from Hempstead, Long Island, has a file filled with pictures of tenants whose worldly belongings were picked up and dumped on the street by landlords who wanted to get them out. "If they can do this with the law," he says, shaking his head, "what do you think will happen without it?" ◀

Rob Neuwirth covers urban affairs for *New York Magazine* and the *Village Voice*.

## Clean air. Clean water. Clean investments.

Founded by environmental advocacy organizations, the Green Century Equity Fund is a no-load stock index fund with a history of growth and solid returns. Just as important, the Equity Fund invests only in environmentally and socially responsible companies. Your investment will not support pollution or the tobacco industry and will actively promote a cleaner, healthier environment.

AVERAGE ANNUAL TOTAL RETURNS* AS OF MARCH 31, 1997	
1 year	19.54%
3 years	20.26%
5 years	15.05%
Since inception	13.76%

If you are serious about your investments and serious about the environment, call us at 1-800-93-GREEN.

**GREEN  
CENTURY  
FUNDS**   
An investment for your future.®



FundsNetwork is a service of Fidelity Brokerage Services, Inc. (FBSI). Member NYSE, SIPC. FBSI may receive remuneration for providing certain recordkeeping and shareholder services to the fund family. FBSI does not recommend or endorse any particular mutual fund.

The performance data quoted represents past performance and is not a guarantee of future results. Investment return and principal value of an investment will fluctuate so that an investor's shares, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than their original cost. The Green Century Equity Fund, which commenced investment operations in September, 1995, invests all of its assets in an existing separate registered investment company which has the same investment objective as the Fund (the "Portfolio"). Consistent with regulatory guidance, performance for the period prior to the Fund's inception reflects the performance of the Portfolio adjusted to reflect the deduction of the charges and expenses of the Fund. Total returns for the periods ending 3/31/97 are historical. The since inception figure is from June 3, 1991. For more complete information, including fees and expenses, please call for a free prospectus. Read it carefully before you invest or send money. Distributor: Signature Broker-Dealer Services, Inc. 4/97

## Breaking Up America

Advertisers  
and the  
New Media World  
**JOSEPH TUROW**

"Fascinating."<sup>99</sup>—*Wired News*

"Painstakingly details how target marketing exploits growing social divisions, to maximize profits, and how, in doing so, it exacerbates these divisions."<sup>99</sup>

—*Publishers Weekly*



Cloth \$22.50

Available at bookstores

THE UNIVERSITY  
OF CHICAGO PRESS  
Visit us at <http://www.press.uchicago.edu>

# *A Silent Disaster in North Korea*

*Slow, chronic starvation on a massive scale*

Photo: World Food Programme/UN



*Hundreds of children dead of starvation*

*Hospitals and schools nearly empty*

*Factories shut down*

*Trees stripped bare, people reduced to eating bark, wood pulp, ground stalks...*

(Observations by United Nations officials)

Severe floods in 1995 and 1996 devastated crops, housing, and irrigation systems in North Korea. Economic isolation means there is little foreign exchange with which to buy food on the world market. Public food rationing has distributed the shortages fairly evenly across the population, but for months rations have been only half a bowl of rice per day.

Only large scale government aid can supply the more than \$300 million worth of food that is needed. The United States has historically contributed one third of necessary food aid to famine stricken countries, but so far this year has given only \$25 million, or eight percent of what is needed for North Korea.

**And the disaster remains silent.**

Few pictures flash across the international media. So we appeal to you.

## *What you can do*

- Make a contribution to the AFSC Korea Relief Fund. One hundred percent of donated money is used to purchase food and ship it immediately. The distribution of food aid is monitored by UN World Food Programme staff to insure it reaches those who are hungry.
- Urge the Clinton Administration to give \$100 million. A starving child knows no politics.



**American Friends Service Committee • Korea Relief Fund**

1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102 • Call toll free 1-888-588-AFSC

- ☐ My contribution is enclosed
- ☐ \$250 will buy one ton of rice and feed 75 people for one month
- ☐ \$125 will provide two weeks of food for 100 children
- ☐ \$60 will feed six families for one month
- ☐ \$20 will feed two families for one month

*Please make checks payable to AFSC*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card No. \_\_\_\_\_

Exp.date \_\_\_\_\_

ITT97

# BLACK AMERICA

## Deconstructing blackness

**W**hen Tiger Woods won the Professional Golf Association's Masters tournament in April, he also teed off a public debate about the role that racial identity plays in American society. In an appearance on the Oprah Winfrey Show shortly after his victory, Woods admitted that it bothered him to be called an African-American. "I'm a 'Cablinasian,'" he explained, using a term he coined to describe his complicated pedigree: one-eighth Caucasian, one-fourth black, one-eighth American Indian, one-fourth Thai and one-fourth Chinese.

Woods' subtle mocking of racial taxonomy sparked a heated reaction from many African-Americans, who interpreted his motives as an attempt to run away from his own blackness. Some commentators concluded that Woods was just another victim of anti-black socialization, rather than a 21-year-old man seeking to

*Should  
African-  
Americans  
abandon  
their claim  
to a unique  
identity?*

By Salim Muwakkil

pay tribute to his polyglot heritage.

Although the media seem to have at last tired of the Tiger Woods controversy, a wider discussion of the politics of racial identity—which for years has bubbled beneath the surface of mainstream discourse on racial issues—has begun to break into the open. In eerily similar essays published in May, two of the country's most venerable and high-brow periodicals, *Harper's Magazine* and *The Atlantic Monthly*, set the tone for what promises to be a contentious new chapter in the ongoing American debate about race.

Jim Sleeper's essay in *Harper's*, "Toward an End of Blackness," is adapted from his new book, *Liberal Racism*, which is scheduled for publication this summer. Sleeper, a former *Village Voice* writer and New York *Daily News* columnist, argues that African-Americans need to surrender their racial consciousness for the good of all Americans. "America needs blacks," he writes, "not because it needs blackness but because it

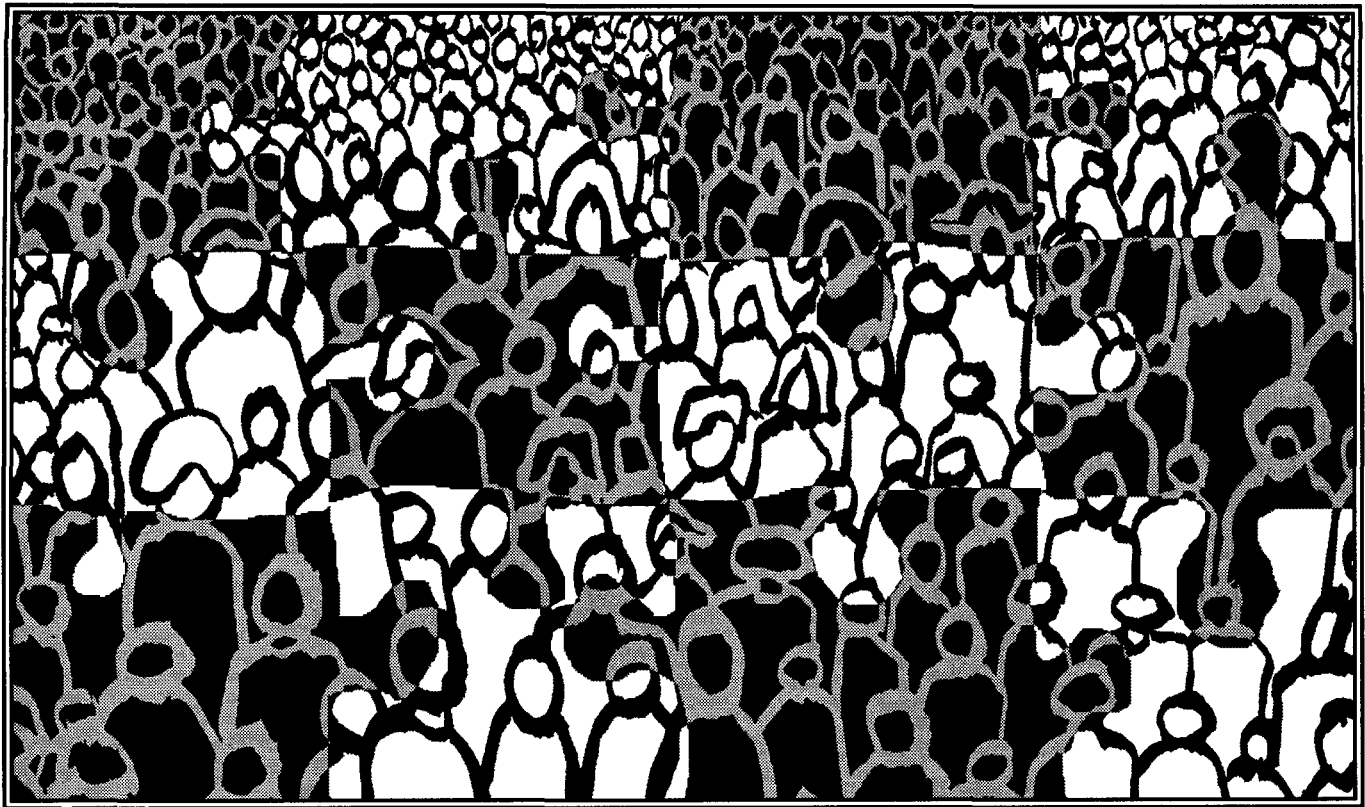
needs what they've learned on their long way out of blackness—what others of us have yet to learn on the journeys we need to take out of whiteness."

Much like a number of avant-garde intellectuals in the mid-'50s (chronicled in Norman Mailer's 1957 essay "White Negro"), Sleeper believes that blacks' lack of ancestral baggage and improvisational identity actually gives them an advantage in the peculiarly American enterprise of self-creation. Sleeper further argues that many blacks have "anticipated and met a challenge now facing everyone else in the country; we are all being 'abducted' from our ancient mythical moorings by powerful currents we no longer control or fully comprehend."

What Sleeper misses—as did his "beat" predecessors of the '50s—is that the improvisational African-American identity he extols has always lacked a self-affirming cultural motif. And as every jazz man knows, without a theme, the song has nowhere to go. Blacks' failure to develop a nurturing identity was a function of the white supremacist cultural biases that socialized black as well as white Americans. And that identity vacuum lies at the root of blacks' overall failure to exploit the American promise. Whether they're being idealized as organic existentialists by Mailer and his ilk, or as authentic Americans by Sleeper, black Americans remain on the low end of all gauges of social well-being.

Sleeper also argues that the "American story"—the myth that underwrites our social contract—is crumbling. He suggests that by retreating into particularism, blacks are not helping things—certainly not themselves. This reprises the themes of his 1990 book, *Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York*, in which Sleeper argued that blacks' quest for a more defined racial consciousness has alienated working-class whites from the larg-





©1997 KIT BOYCE

er struggle for social justice. He elaborates on this argument in the *Harper's* essay by questioning the utility of racial identity altogether. Quoting Ghanaian philosopher K. Anthony Appiah, Sleeper notes that much of what is considered African culture is actually "products of the European gaze." Ironically, he writes, some African traditions were concocted just to construct a national identity, which itself was a European concept. "Blackness," he writes, has one legitimate use only: "as a foil to whiteness."

Sleeper doesn't impugn blacks for pursuing equal citizenship but for going down the wrong track since the "color-blind" days of the civil rights movement. He fully acknowledges the heroic dimensions of blacks' struggle for equality. "For all its wrong turns and dead ends," he writes, "the quest by black Americans for acknowledgment and belonging in our national life is the most powerful epic of unrequited love in the history of the world." Despite this monumental lack of reciprocity, however, Sleeper remains confident that mainstream America will one day see the light and embrace the descendants of its former slaves. He writes that "the country's special debt to blacks cannot be paid by anything less than an inclusion that brings the implosion of the identity of blackness—and, with it, of whiteness."

Sleeper is one of a number of white progressives who in recent years have soured on left-wing politics, arguing that it's been corroded by "identity politics"—that is, politics that takes racial, ethnic, sexual and gender identities as the basis of its agenda. Identity politics, these critics argue, builds too narrow a platform to support a broad social movement. Sleeper has focused on the excesses of New

York's rambunctious black nationalist community, but has been widening his purview of late.

Black Americans who seek ancestral connections to Africa, in Sleeper's view, are misguided. Such connections are as ephemeral as his links are to the Lithuania of his Jewish ancestors. What's more, he believes, the preoccupation with finding ancestral connections is dangerous romanticism that prevents African-Americans from coming to terms with their advantages and responsibilities as Americans.

Sleeper chides the late Alex Haley, author of the 1976 best-seller *Roots*, for depicting Africa as little more than a mythic negation of whiteness. *Roots* emerged amidst "a retaliatory black parochialism" that assailed "blacks whom it deemed too accommodating." Haley's book, which was transformed into a 12-hour miniseries and watched by the largest audience in television history, seemed at first to satisfy partisans on both sides of the color line. But ultimately, Sleeper writes, *Roots* failed because it offered a problematic idealization of Africa and blackness.

*Roots* was upbeat whereas it should have highlighted the tragic aspect of American history, Sleeper argues. The book and the miniseries amounted to a taming of history. After all, *Roots'* happy ending and inspirational subtexts relieved whites. True enough; *Roots* reinforced the mythic aspects of the American Dream. But it revealed new dimensions of blacks' American nightmare to hundreds of millions of people. I'm not sure how that can be called an unqualified failure.

Sleeper's argument is more nuanced than a traditional view—that blacks need to absorb superior European values and eschew black separatism—often pushed by advocates of

"color-blind" policies; after all, he also condemns "white" identity. However, the very title of his piece suggests that he believes that blacks should make the first move in shedding racial identity. So while his writing may be a bit less hyperbolic than those who denounce the tyranny of race-specific policies such as affirmative action, he nonetheless arrives at the same conclusions: African-Americans must abandon the crutch of blackness in order to put America back on the road to progress.

Randall Kennedy, whose essay "My Race Problem—And Ours" is the May cover story in *The Atlantic Monthly*, is even more extreme in his exhortations to abandon racial consciousness. *The Atlantic's* editors preface the piece with the boast that Kennedy, a black professor at Harvard Law School, "manages the difficult feat of saying something new about race." Well, he certainly raises provocative questions. "What is the proper role of race in determining how I, an American black, should feel toward others?" Kennedy asks in the first sentence. Elsewhere he considers: Are African-Americans justified in their racial pride? Should "blood ties" between African-Americans be accorded a special status? How valid is racial loyalty?

"Neither racial pride nor racial kinship offers guidance that is intellectually, morally or politically satisfactory," Kennedy answers. He rejects racial pride because he believes one should derive pride from "something that he or she has accomplished," not for some state of affairs independent of one's contributions. "I reject the notion of racial kinship," Kennedy writes, "in order to avoid its burdens and to be free to claim what the distinguished political theorist Michael Sandel labels, 'the unencumbered self.'" Kennedy argues that he is motivated by a "liberal, individualistic and universalistic ethos that is skeptical of, if not hostile to, the particularisms—national, ethnic, religious and racial—that seem to have grown so strong recently."

"Unless inhibited," Kennedy writes, "every person and group will tend toward beliefs and practices that are self-

*Continued on page 36*



# PLUTO PRESS



## CALIBAN'S FREEDOM

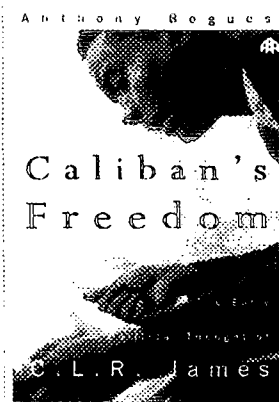
NEW

*The Early Political Thought of C.L.R. James*

Anthony Bogues

The first study to excavate the elements of a Jamesian political philosophy: Anthony Bogues examines the origins of the relationship between the black radical tradition and James's own view of Marxism.

Apr 97 • Paper • \$19.95 • 0 7453 0614 4  
Library cloth ed \$49.95 • 0 7453 0613 6



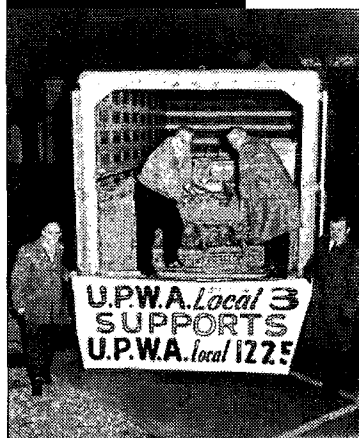
Available from your local bookstore. In case of difficulty or for a copy of the 1997 Pluto Press Complete Catalogue please order from: LPC InBook, 1436 West Randolph, Chicago, Illinois 60607. Individual orders tel: 800 523 0301 Trade orders tel: 800 626 3440 • Fax (all orders) : 800 334 3892

Visit the NEW Pluto Press home page: <http://www.leeway.co.uk/plutopress>

## Unionizing the Jungles

Labor and Community in the Twentieth-Century Meatpacking Industry

EDITED BY SHELTON STROMQUIST  
AND MARVIN BERGMAN



"Recounts the struggle of working men and women—black and white, immigrant and native born—to improve wages and working conditions in the meatpacking industry since Upton Sinclair's time. This collection is essential reading for anyone interested in the history of labor, trade unions, or meatpacking in America."—Donald D. Stull, coeditor, *Any Way You Cut It: Meat Processing and Small Town America*  
280 pages, \$32.95 cloth

Available at bookstores

iowa

University of Iowa Press

Iowa City, Iowa • 800-235-2665



# I N T H E A R T S

## Gypsy cipher

# D

irector Tony Gatlif found the 11-year-old star of his latest film, *Mondo*, in the Paris Metro, where the customary Gallic response to a dusky face and outstretched hand is recoil. The boy, Ovidiu Balan, is a Romanian Gypsy who was about to be deported when Gatlif, himself a French citizen of Rom Gypsy origin, saved him from his fate—but only for the duration of the film-making.

Balan is back in Romania now, where, as throughout Europe, the end of Communism has revived an age-old tradition of persecution against the continent's largest and most reviled minority population. Balan's narrative, as far as the rest of the world is concerned, ends in a mystery bounded only by what we can imagine about the future of the dispossessed.

Mystery is at the heart of our perception of Gypsy

life. At a time when a term like "marginality" has become a fashionably mainstream academic conceit, Gypsies (or Rom people, as many prefer to be called) remain largely unknown and stubbornly "outsiders." Even the most enlightened observers confess ambivalence and puzzlement.

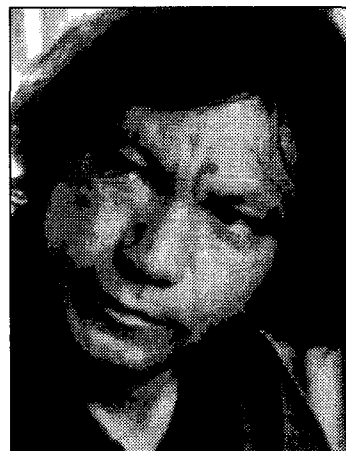
It's only in the last few years that Rom culture has reluctantly opened itself up to scrutiny from the outside world with such works as Isabel Fonseca's *Bury Me Standing*, a journalist's firsthand account of several Gypsy communities in Europe, and Gatlif's previous film, *Latcho Drom*, a documentary of Gypsy music and dance. Still, stereotypes of Gypsies as "wanderers," "thieves" and "shifty" dictate our perceptions. Like *Latcho Drom*, *Mondo* is admirable in its refusal to truck with these stereotypes—maybe too admirable. It treads so lightly around the issues of prejudice and preconception that the film is in danger of disappearing from the viewer's consciousness as soon as the last frame flickers off the screen.

To be fair, *Mondo* doesn't purport to be any sort of document about contemporary Gypsy culture. The film doesn't even identify its young protagonist specifically as a Rom. Adapted from a story by the French fiction writer J.M.G. Le Clezio, *Mondo* is a fable about the magic an outsider can bestow on the ordinary. A homeless boy of unknown origin drifts into the lives of the street people and shopkeepers of Nice, makes his mark and disappears.

A nearly plotless slice of poetic realism, the movie unfolds as a series of images, a procession of scenes and sequences that shape a dialectic between the boy Mondo's encounters with nature and the "civilized" world. We first see Mondo from behind the windows of Nice's well-appointed stores as the boy confronts the monuments of an inaccessible consumer paradise—rows of jewels, shoes and clothes. Next, we're out on the street with him, where succulent mounds of ripe berries beckon in an open-air market. It's a world of plenty—except for the child without resources or attachments. Gatlif imparts this awareness without sentiment or sanctimony, simply showing us what the boy sees, placing us in his line of sight until it's inevitable we

*In Mondo,  
Tony Gatlif  
offers a fable  
about the  
magic an  
outsider can  
bestow on the  
ordinary.*

By Linda DeLibero



**Mondo**  
Directed by Tony Gatlif



understand his relation to the things we take for granted.

A true visual artist, Gatlif is adept at this sort of nuanced communication. There are echoes of Truffaut's young Antoine Doinel and Satyajit Ray's Apu in his treatment of childhood; he's completely tuned into the wonder and playfulness of a child's perceptions without turning the material into mush. That light touch allows him to get away with bits that, in another director's hands, would be coy beyond bearing—for example, a scene where statues of the likes of Balzac and Flaubert whisper to the sleeping Mondo. We're dangerously close to "noble savage" territory here, the conceit that the wild child has privileged access to secret knowledge. But just when you think the film is about to succumb, Gatlif quietly pulls back to a neutral, observational stance. He's careful, too, to avoid finger-waving at the usual suspects. When Mondo follows a well-heeled family around a supermarket as the kids pile cakes into a shopping cart, it's not a condemnation of the heartless bourgeoisie; they're simply doing what middle-class kids do in their world.

Gatlif has assembled a cast of nonprofessionals here, and he's pulled some beautifully natural performances from them. Like Ovidiu Balan, they're mostly real-life misfits or outsiders. Jerry Smith, a homeless Scotsman whom Gatlif discovered under a concrete flyover in Nice, plays Dadi, an elderly vagabond who carries a pair of pigeons around in a suitcase. Tightrope artist Philippe Petit makes an appearance as a street performer. Pierrette Fesch (whose husband, executed by the French government in 1957, is now undergoing beatification by the Catholic Church) is remarkable as a Vietnamese Jew who takes Mondo in. She looks something like a saint herself, and as soon as she appears on the scene,

*Mondo's star, 11-year-old Ovidiu Balan*

she quietly but completely takes over the film.

Still, *Mondo's* loose, indirect approach begins to feel a little bloodless after a while. At times, the images are so subtle and allusive that you need program notes to understand. For example, at one point, Mondo discovers a cache of oranges in the sea. They bear Arabic inscriptions that actually calls for help from Algerian women. You won't know this unless you read the letter Gatlif sent to Le Clezio after the filming.

And because it quickly becomes apparent that Mondo (that name!) functions as a metaphor for an entire culture, he bears the burden of expectations that the film has no intention of meeting. Balan has a sweet, open face, but he's presented as not much more than a cipher filtering impressions. The rich, complex set of relations between a culture and its individuals that Satyajit Ray sets up in his Apu trilogy is absent here. Except for Fesch, no one is allowed to register even the specter of sorrow or gravity. Mondo is just a lovely boy with a big smile. Nor is there any attempt to address the world's troubled relationship with the Rom. There are faceless authorities and sympathetic observers, but none of them quite comes to life.

Of course, they're really not meant to. *Mondo* is a fairy tale, and as such it's not obliged to do much more than unfold its magical images for our delectation. But Gatlif is clearly a director whose potent visual stylings promise more than he cares to deliver here. As the only Gypsy currently making films today, he's someone whose development will be interesting to watch. ◀

# IN PRINT

## Summer reading

### *In These Times* editors' picks

MILES HARVEY

**T**ops on my list is Charles Baxter's new collection of short fiction, *Believers* (Pantheon). Baxter, the author of such extraordinary works as *Through the Safety Net* and *A Relative Stranger*, is a soaring storyteller—funny, graceful and unpredictable. He is never didactic, but unlike most of his contemporaries, he doesn't shy away from trying to make sense of America as a whole, not just individual Americans. In *Believers*, he examines the gap between faith and conviction, between what we want to believe and what we need to believe. Baxter is also a first-rate literary critic, and his new collection *Burning Down the House: Essays on Fiction* (Graywolf)—which includes maverick musings on such subjects as Richard Nixon's long-term impact on the novel—promises to be compelling.

I also hope to get to Sharon Solwitz's short fiction collection, *Blood and Milk* (Sarabande Books). Solwitz, an editor of the marvelously quirky literary journal *Another Chicago Magazine*, has been quietly cranking out one superb story after another in publications large and small, and here her sharply rendered tales are gathered for the first time.

One final work of fiction on my summer list is *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* (Harcourt Brace), by Portuguese novelist José Saramago, the author of such complex and lyrical works as *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*. In this novel about a proofreader at a Lisbon publishing house who decides to alter an account of a medieval siege, the incomparable Reis offers a look at the instability of history and historical writing.

Another writer obsessed with history is the poet Campbell McGrath, whose award-winning *Spring Comes to Chicago* (Ecco) sits atop my stack of must-read verse. In his earlier works, *Capitalism* and *American Noise*, the funny and accessible McGrath has demonstrated an admirable knack for exploring social issues in an offbeat way. Here, his central poem uses the life of Bob Hope to explore every-

thing from environmental destruction to commodity fetishism to the Doobie Brothers.

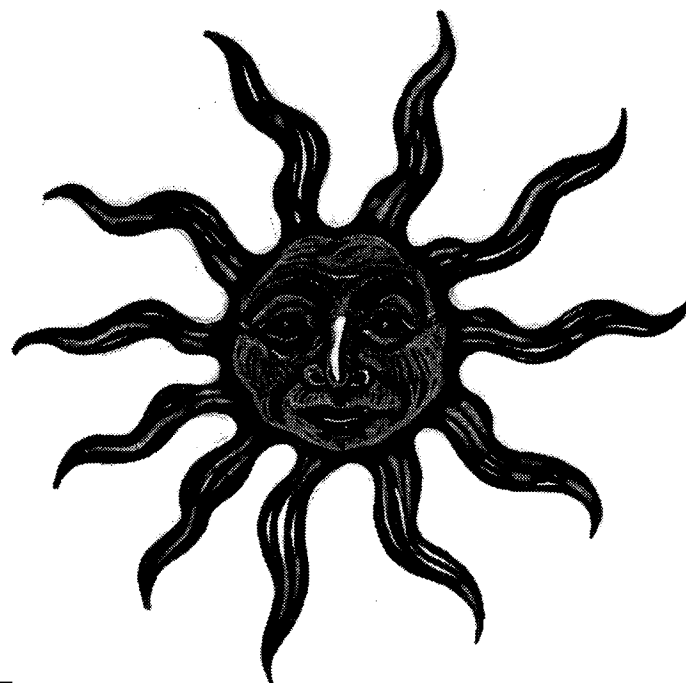
As far as nonfiction goes, I'm looking forward to former *In These Times* contributor Sara Corbett's *Venus to the Hoop: An Olympic Year in Women's Basketball* (Doubleday), which figures to offer an engrossing glimpse at the personalities and politics of one of the fastest-growing sectors of sport. And finally, I'll be perusing *Another America: Native American Maps and the History of Our Land* by Mark Warhus (St. Martin's Press), the first book devoted to the fascinating and little-understood subject of Native American cartography.

PAT ARNOW

**L**ast week, when I started as culture editor of *In These Times*, I entered an office full of new books. Our intern Gretchen Purser had arranged the review copies by subject: fiction, environment, race, gay/lesbian issues, history. I was happy as a flea in a kennel.

Here's *Accordion Crimes* (Scribner), newly out in paperback. This novel about the history of the accordion in America of all things is by E. Annie Proulx, the author of *The Shipping News*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel that was satisfying reading. I open the new book to a random page: "Folk music, eh? Ethnic! I'm telling you, it's something you gotta know." This will be fun to read.

The title, *Liberal Racism* (Viking Penguin), sparks my interest, as I recently worked in the intensely race-conscious progressive community of Durham, N.C. "Conservatives may have gotten race wrong, but that does not mean that liberals have gotten it right," writes Jim Sleeper. He promises



ILLUSTRATIONS ©1997 SHEILA FLINCHPAUGH



to "describe the civic balance we need to reclaim in our public life if we are to undo the damage that liberal myopia has done." Are his ideas going to be original and thoughtful, or backlash rubbish? I'm not too hopeful, but it seems worth a closer look.

On and off for the past several years, I have been working on an anthology about Appalachian veterans with Bertram Allen, a psychologist who is a Vietnam veteran and a pacifist. (Appalachians generally served and died at higher rates than military personnel from other parts of the nation.) That is why *Writing Between the Lines: An Anthology on War and Its Social Consequences* (University of Massachusetts Press), edited by Kevin Bowen and Bruce Weigl, caught my attention. The editors have compiled extraordinary writing about war and its aftermath from Vietnamese, Guatemalan and American writers among others. They include, for instance, a collection, "Poems from Captured Documents," that features verses such as this from the diary of Nguyen Van Luc: "Our white-haired parents help each other return. / They love every root of every tree. / They build temporary huts from bamboo trees. / Gradually, day and night, they forget their grief."

Before reading these new books, I want to finish another outstanding work about war and its aftermath, Pat Barker's trilogy about World War I. These novels fictionalize the lives of English poet/war protester Siegfried Sassoon, writers Robert Graves and Wilfred Owen, and psychiatrist Dr. William Rivers, who treated their war trauma. I'm reading the first book of the series, *Regeneration*, a work of spare understatement. It is followed by *Eye in the Door* and *Ghost Road*.

## JOEL BLEIFUSS

As usual, this summer I'll read books published in 1996 that are out in paperback in 1997.

For the past year and a half, I have reverted to my youth and gone on a science-fiction kick. My current favorite sci-fi author, C.J. Cherryh, has what *Publisher's Weekly* terms a "gift for conjuring believable alien cultures." Her politics are also good, which is not the norm in this genre. *Inheritor* (Daw) the sequel to *Foreigner* and *Invader*, continues the adventures of Bren Cameron, who is the human ambassador to the Atevi, beings who share a planet with a population of space-shipwrecked humans.

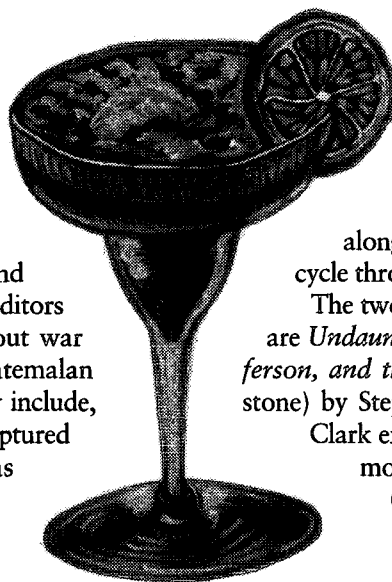
In the genre of horror fiction, I'll read *Sacrament* (HarperCollins) by Clive Barker, a compelling writer who could use a more forceful editor. The last book of his that I

read, the epic-length *Imajica*, would have been improved by cutting 300 pages.

As for cyber-fiction, it's going to be a virtually dry summer. William Gibson's *Idoru* is not out in paperback until the fall, and Neal Stephenson has not had a new book in two years. Ditto for mysteries; P.D. James writes too slowly.

When it comes to what some people refer to as serious literature, I depend on recommendations from my friend Barnett in Seattle. On his advice, I'll be reading *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (Harper Perennial) by Rebecca Wells, a Louisiana author. And somewhere along the line, I'll read some Jane Austen, whom I cycle through every three years.

The two nonfiction books that I'll crack this summer are *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (Touchstone) by Stephen E. Ambrose. It's about the Lewis and Clark expedition and reads like a novel. To get in the mood for a trip to Cuba in June, I'm reading *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (Grove Press) by Jon Lee Anderson, a 1997 book, which, thanks to a review copy from the publisher, I can read in hardback.



## CHRIS LEHMANN

Nicolaus Mills has a volume of cultural criticism due in August, *The Triumph of Meanness: America's War Against Its Better Self* (Houghton Mifflin). Mills is an astringent, witty and morally impassioned critic of the invidious rancor that increasingly passes for political discourse and entertainment in our culture. His book looks like just the companion piece for the summer's coming parade of *Independence Days* and prime-time TV.

It says a lot about the current disarray of global capitalism that the chief economist at *Business Week* and CNBC television would co-author a book called *The Judas Economy: The Triumph of Capital and the Betrayal of Work* (Addison-Wesley). Yet William Wolman, the aforementioned Pooh-Bah, has done just that, with the assistance of former *Business Week* staff writer Anne Colamosca. The book in some ways appears to partake in the George Soros school of elite hand-wringing, posing questions in its chapter headings such as "Can We Depend on Wall Street?" and "A New Crisis of Capitalism?" that tempt one to reply with a resounding "Duh!" Yet in an age that glibly consigns both downsized American industrial workers and their all-too-vigorously employed counterparts in Haitian and Indonesian sweatshops to the grand historical inevitability of globalization, it is refreshing to see the plight of betrayed work-

ers taken seriously at all.

One forthcoming book I've already read is Peter W. Morgan and Glenn H. Reynolds' *The Appearance of Impropriety in America*. Due out in September from the Free Press, this briskly argued polemic dissects a paradox that should be obvious to anyone following the debauchery of national political life: As ethics bureaucracies (and independent counsels) continue to proliferate, the quality of public morality deteriorates.

In an ethics culture governed by appearances rather than substance, no one is ever held clearly accountable, and public scandals—from the torturous Whitewater hearings to the empty-headed science inquiries generated by the National Institutes of Health's Office of Research Integrity—have become gnat-brain-straining exercises in the professionalization of moral discourse.

The authors observe that these paradoxes are old indeed in Anglophone culture. They are, in fact, symptoms of "Blifil morality"—so named after a particularly sedulous and amoral character in Henry Fielding's 18th-century opus *Tom Jones*. Augustan England, the authors observe, was a society much like our own: It "had just become the world's only superpower" and sprouted "a burgeoning professional class and a newly expanding bureaucracy" all "focused on appearances as the means of getting ahead."

Until, as the authors argue, we find our way clear to a public morality that abjures mere appearance and takes virtue seriously, we can only expect the Blifils in our midst to multiply.

## DEIDRE McFADYEN

I always have a teetering pile of books by my night table. Near the top of that stack right now are three new releases.

Ever since I read an excerpt in *The New Yorker* in April, I've been itching to get my hands on Robert Reich's *Locked in the Cabinet* (Random House). If the excerpt is an indication, Reich's memoirs, adapted from a diary he kept during his four years as labor secretary, offer an extraordinarily candid and perceptive account of how Washington's major players think and operate. Reich presents himself as a feisty liberal doing battle with Clinton's vital centrists. With wry, self-deprecating wit, he recounts experiences that speak volumes about Beltway culture. At the rehearsal for his Senate confirmation hearing, his coaches give Reich the following advice: The hearing is designed not to test your knowledge, but to test your respect for the senators on the committee. Concerning his lunch with Alan Greenspan in the chairman's elegant private dining room, Reich observes "the egalitarian zealotry of the rest of the executive branch has not reached this rarefied precinct."

I've been fascinated by Che Guevara ever since reading some years ago Jay Cantor's mesmerizing fictional rendering

of his life, *The Death of Che Guevara* (unfortunately out of print). Now he has become the flavor of the month. Readers gobbled up *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Verso, 1995), selections from Che's journal of his trip across South America at age 24. Che Guevara watches and berets at Bloomingdale's soon followed.

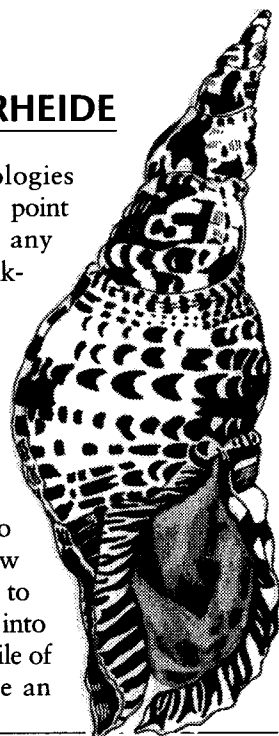
This year, the 30th anniversary of Che's death in the Bolivian jungle, has brought more serious fare to the public. *The Death of Che Guevara*, a wonderful Spanish documentary film about the final weeks of the revolutionary's life, has been making the rounds in arthouse theaters. Jon Lee Anderson's *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* is an 814-page tome that the publisher touts as "the first definitive and extensively researched biography." Anderson, a journalist who has covered Latin American politics for 18 years, had unprecedented access to Che's personal archive through the cooperation of his widow, Aleida March. My fingers are crossed that this biography will do justice to Che's complex political thought and motivations.

I don't usually read mysteries, but I couldn't put down—and was stumped by—Arturo Pérez-Reverte's *The Flanders Panel* when I read it last summer. The novel has a Chinese box structure of interlocking realities: A series of murders in the present is somehow connected to an unsolved murder that occurred in Holland in the 17th century. The resolution of both mysteries is encoded in a game of chess depicted on an old Flemish painting of unknown origin. The reader is invited to interpret the moves and solve the mystery. Pérez-Reverte's omnivorous imagination and historical reach are on display once again in his new novel, *The Club Dumas* (Harcourt Brace), which concerns a secret society of antiquarians and the hunt for a rare book of Satanic lore. I hope I'll have better luck penetrating this mystery.

## PAT AUFDERHEIDE

New communications technologies have simplified my life to the point where I don't think I can stand any more help. You know what I'm talking about. The opportunity to fax from the beach or your bedroom. The chance to download that document instead of perusing the snail-mailed version. And so on.

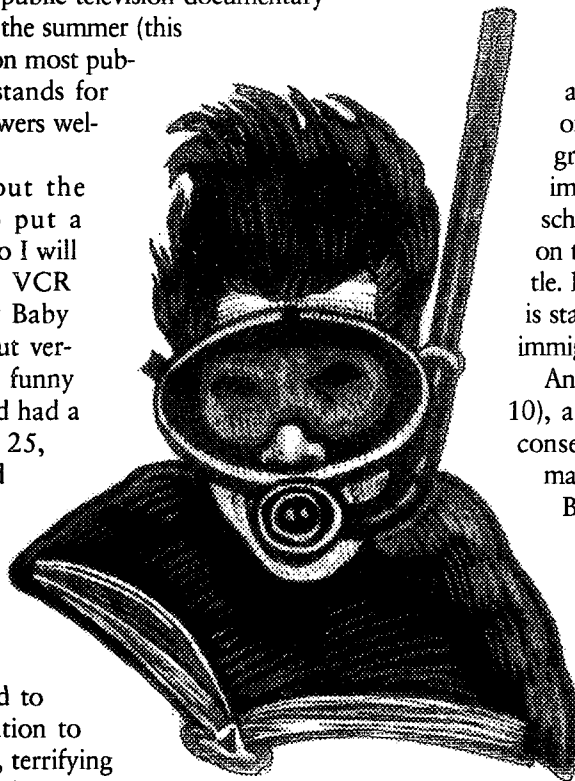
Among the many new efficiencies of my life, I no longer have to leave my home to attend preview screenings. The videocassettes come to me and pile up. That's why, going into summer, along with my daunting pile of postponed reading matter, I have an



untidy collection of viewing matter. But some of it I plan to get to sooner rather than later, and with greater eagerness.

Every year at this time, the public television documentary series *P.O.V.* airs. Throughout the summer (this year from June 3 to August 5 on most public stations), *P.O.V.* (which stands for point of view) will give TV viewers welcome diversity.

I'm always curious about the power of documentary to put a human face on social issues. So I will probably first pop into my VCR Judith Helfand's "A Healthy Baby Girl" (June 17). The rough-cut version of this film was sad and funny and deeply disturbing. Helfand had a hysterectomy when she was 25, after she discovered she had cancer apparently triggered by DES, the anti-miscarriage drug her mother took. The consequences were appalling, and not just for her but for her whole family. She decided to chronicle her family's adaptation to this permanent, guilt-inducing, terrifying feature of their lives together. She wanted



to show, she says, that she and her family were victims of informed corporate risk-taking, one case of far too many throughout the world.

I also want to see "Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary" (July 1). This is one of those first-timer movies. A fourth-grade teacher made it about her school. An immigrant from Mexico, she teaches in a school full of immigrant children who are on the front lines of the Proposition 187 battle. Prop 187, which passed in California but is stalled in the courts, bars children of illegal immigrants from attending public school.

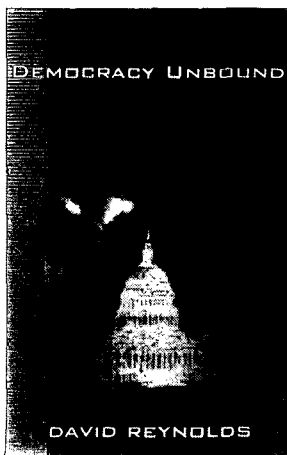
And then there's "Battle of the Minds" (June 10), about the struggles between liberals and conservatives among the Southern Baptists, made by a man whose mother is a Southern Baptist minister. "Jesse's Gone" (June 24) is a black filmmaker's portrait of the death of a rap singer. And finally, "In Whose Honor?" (July 15) is about a woman who has organized against Indian names for sports teams.

These shows ought to keep me busy, and possibly even drive away the doldrums usually associated with summertime TV. ▴



## NEW FROM SOUTH END PRESS

### DEMOCRACY UNBOUND PROGRESSIVE CHALLENGES TO THE TWO PARTY SYSTEM BY DAVID REYNOLDS



"Dave Reynolds has written an excellent book that all progressives should read. As we learn from each other's experiences, we improve our chances of making the fundamental political changes that this country desperately needs."  
—Representative Bernie Sanders

\$20, ISBN 0-89608-563-5

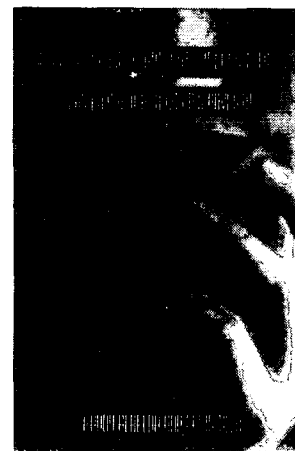
### GLASS CEILINGS AND BOTTOMLESS PITS

WOMEN'S WORK, WOMEN'S POVERTY  
BY RANDY ALBELDA AND CHRIS TILLY

"*Glass Ceilings and Bottomless Pits* will quickly become the fundamental book about women, work, and poverty. Albelda and Tilly show how and why the powers-that-be benefit from scapegoating and marginalizing women."

—Professor Mimi Abramovitz,  
Hunter College School of  
Social Work

\$18, ISBN 0-89608-565-1  
Available August 1997



AVAILABLE AT INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORES. OR CALL 1-800-533-8478 TO ORDER.



# Bad ideas for bad girls

By Emily Gordon

Should we bother listening to Naomi Wolf? In her glitzy, post-*Beauty Myth* ubiquity, this self-proclaimed “recovering Marxist” has told us we should stand by our man, Bill Clinton. She has counseled us to hold candlelight vigils for aborted fetuses, most likely conceived, as she puts it, in those “I don’t know what came over me, it was such good Chardonnay” moments. We pro-choicers should make penitent amends to our God, to whom we should give “a seat at the table” if we ever want to reach well-meaning conservatives. What’s more, women must “stop thinking of themselves as the passive victims of history,” quit their bellyaching, seize the banks and boardrooms, and build strong marriages and strong families for a stronger America. No wonder serious feminists distrust Wolf.

Just five years ago, Wolf promised to be, like Susan Faludi, a feminist for our age. She wasn’t afraid to get mad, had facts at hand and seemed to know us better than we knew ourselves. But for many young feminists, Wolf is a lot like her pal Clinton: Just as we once worked and voted for his pragmatic idealism, we read and promoted hers. Our sense of betrayal toward both is fierce. Nevertheless, Wolf’s new book, *Promiscuities: The Secret Struggle Toward Womanhood*, offers, if not redemption, some fresh material that merits giving her another look.

As Wolf explains in the introduction, *Promiscuities* is “not a polemic but a set of confessions—a subjective exploration” of teenage girls’ sexuality. It’s part dreamy memoir, part cultural critique, part high-minded how-to. She quotes from conversations with contemporary young women as well as with her own now-grown girlfriends who came of age in San Francisco in the “liberated” ’60s and ’70s. She culls from history, anthropology and science texts as well as from the “libraries of adolescence that my girlfriends and I plundered for sexual information and imagery”—*Seventeen*, *Lolita*, *Archie* comics, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Through all of this research, which she

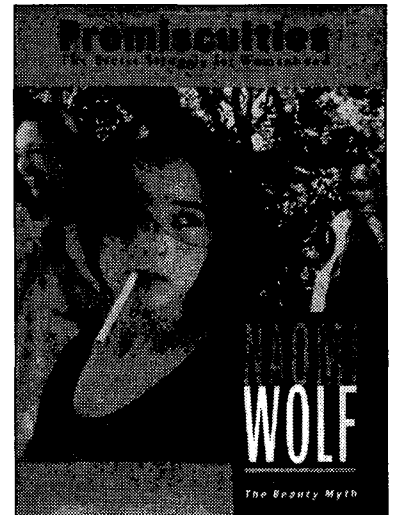
acknowledges is not representative, Wolf attempts to show why, in modern America, it is such a “secret struggle” for girls to find ways to celebrate womanhood.

She decries the dearth of positive rites of passage for young women. There have been, she points out, places and times in which women’s sexuality was valued more highly. For example, she recounts an adolescent girls’ coming-of-age ceremony among northwest coast Indians (what tribe or when, she leaves unspecified). For several months, the village’s women “taught [the girls] with jokes and with songs, with legends and with examples, how to care for and enjoy their bodies, how to respect themselves and their bodily functions” and “explained to them all they would ever need to know about pregnancy, childbirth and childcare.” As a local girl told it, “We had to swim back to the village. The people would watch for you, and they’d light fires on the beach, and when finally they saw you, they’d start to sing a victory song about how a girl went for a swim and a woman came home.”

This stuff is stirring—especially considering the current state of things, which Wolf sums up neatly: “In our world, ‘Demonstrate that you are a woman’ means simply, ‘Take off your clothes.’” Even in the permissive age in which Wolf grew up, she writes, girls found themselves defined as “sluts” and ended up learning more about how to be desired than about their own desire.

Wolf is best in her first-person anecdotes, brave and surprisingly economical pieces of writing on their own. She tells stories of her physically abusive first boyfriend, of the English professor who seduced undergraduate women with cooing flattery about their papers, of how strangers at parties, hearing that she worked at a rape-crisis center hotline, would reveal past sexual assaults. There’s little rhetoric here to undermine these stories’ appeal.

Though she can project an implausible level of insight onto her adolescent self, Wolf, now in her mid-30s, does an admirable job of recreating young people’s inner monologues and conversations. Many readers will recognize themselves in her observations: “Even though we had had intercourse, we were girls,” she writes. “We knew what was expected of us sexually better than we knew our own strengths in the



**Promiscuities: The Secret Struggle Toward Womanhood**  
By Naomi Wolf  
Random House  
265 pp., \$23

world—better even than we knew our own bodies.”

*Promiscuities* would have been riveting to my sixth-grade class in 1982. In the '70s, she writes, “the sexual information we had access to presented us with three genuine myths. The first was that boys want it more. The second was that the sexual revolution had for the first time allowed women in general to be perceived as sexual beings. The third was that 20th-century science, in conjunction with the renascent feminist movement, had newly bestowed upon us the location of a clitoris.” Wolf counters these myths with “A Short History of the Slut” and “Lost & Found: The Story of the Clitoris” since 1559.

It's fair to protest, as many did when *The Beauty Myth* came out, that much of this has been said before—and by far more radical voices. But there are some kinds of history, and women's history is one, that are perpetually erased and require telling again and again. Wolf writes insightfully about her generation; I have not read anywhere such an accurate picture of post-divorce family life in the '70s.

But no one who read *Fire With Fire*, Wolf's rambling tome on “power” versus “victim” feminism, will be surprised to hear that Wolf is rhetorically all over the place in *Promiscuities*. At times, she descends into aimless self-indulgence and wallows in purple prose: “When our shrieks were released with their marvelous piercing quality into the moist, still air of the empty, late-afternoon neighborhood. ...”

Wolf sprinkles harebrained ideas for a better sexual tomorrow throughout, zooming around the stratosphere with pie-in-the-sky California dreamin': We should form our own “Womanhood Guides” to take girls on hikes and teach them “sexual ethics” and math. If men were more sexually adept, she claims, there would be fewer divorces. And she calls for a return to making out by “bases”: “We should teach petting—‘sexual gradualism’—and let our kids know that there are many ways of having pleasure and inti-

macy that don't involve intercourse.” If girls feel good about themselves, she argues, they won't get pregnant. So why aren't the rates of teenage pregnancy in most European countries as high as ours? It's probably not because they know nice names for the female genitalia, but because they have better access to contraception.

*Promiscuities* has other serious flaws. Several chapters are needlessly long—one especially tedious section is devoted to the travails of a sensitive frat boy. The grown friends she quotes speak in suspiciously well-constructed paragraphs and are more often piously wounded than ribald. And in the penultimate chapter, Wolf explains—straight-faced—that with Victorian-style wedding imagery “we are made into treasure again ... in white we retrieve our virginity.” This is exactly the sort of dismal mishmash you might expect from a writer who has compared having an abortion to evading the draft.

But Wolf's failures, both past and present, don't detract from her powerful analyses. “In the wake of the sexual revolution,” she writes in *Promiscuities*, “with the line between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ girls always shifting, keeping us unsteady, as it is meant to do ... it will not be safe for us to live comfortably in our skins until we say: You can no longer separate us out from one another. We are all bad girls.”

The clear voices of the bad girls who speak in this book help deflate Wolf's own sanctimonious rhetoric. A woman she quotes who had an abortion at 19, despite “very mixed feelings,” does not seem to feel the need for public wailing and gnashing of teeth. “A society that practically requires young women to be sexual had damned well better have [abortion] available,” the woman tells her. Wolf is right on the money when she writes, in another chapter, “It is neither natural nor inevitable that women's lust should be punished.” Nor should its consequences—including abortion. ◀

Emily Gordon has written for the *Village Voice* and *The Nation*, among other publications.

Where in the world can progressive people of faith find discussions of the issue of politics and culture facing us in the world today

Sojourners

A magazine charting the sometimes difficult course of faith through the challenges and celebrations of the day.

A special offer for *In These Times* readers:

\$20 for one year.

Save 30% off regular price. Call today and ask for offer

**HITT 1.**

**1-800-714-7474**

(sample issue available)

Continued from page 27

aggrandizing." He finds it difficult "to accept that it is wrong for whites to mobilize themselves on a racial basis solely for purposes of white advancement but morally permissible for blacks to mobilize for black advancement." Finally, he argues, "racial mobilization prompts racial countermobilization" and reinforces a pattern of racial competition.

Kennedy may indeed be "saying something new about race," but it's not clear that he is saying anything cogent. In fact, his denunciations of particularism raise the question of whether he has thought about identity politics as it applies to ethnic groups other than blacks. For example, what if he had asked Jewish Americans, instead of African-Americans, about their blood ties and racial loyalty? Would he have come to the same conclusions? Either way, it's a safe bet that *The Atlantic's* editors would have been considerably less enthusiastic about the novelty of Kennedy's essay if he set out to demystify Jewish identity.

An articulate contrarian, Kennedy delights in extending egalitarian rhetoric to its logical extreme. Aware of the anger and consternation his ideas are likely to provoke among most black activists, he writes, "my thesis is anathema, the most foolhardy idealism, a plan for ruination, a plea for unilateral disarmament by blacks in the face of a well-armed foe with a long history of bad intentions." And he's right. Only by decontextualizing the "white" West's relationship to the rest of the world can Kennedy invoke his idealistic notions of moral symmetry. The "liberal, individualistic and universalistic ethos" Kennedy touts so highly has also worked, since the advent of African slavery and imperial conquest, to allocate global resources disproportionately to the West.

"If [Kennedy] was focusing just on race as a category, I could be more in agreement with him," says Rod Watts, a professor of psychology at DePaul University in Chicago who has done considerable research on issues of racial identity. Race is indeed a social construction that has no ultimate

biological validity, Watts allows. "But living in a world where social designations have meaning and have an impact on our lives, we have to deal with those realities," he says.

Many black observers detect another agenda in the attack on identity politics. Haki Madhubuti, a Chicago-based writer, teacher and longtime theorist of black nationalism, believes it's more than mere serendipity that two of the nation's elite opinion magazines feature similar articles during the same month. "America is in the midst of a sustained backlash against the tiny gains blacks have made in past years," he says. "These arguments denouncing so-called identity politics are providing the intellectual rationale for this rollback.

"Go to any store in Chicago's black community and only in very few places will you find *The Atlantic* or *Harper's*," Madhubuti continues. "So it's clear whom Kennedy's argument is directed to: those white intellectuals who influence the crafting of social and political policy. [*Harper's* and *The Atlantic*] would never publish any serious work by me or Mualana Karenga [professor of black studies at the University of California-San Diego], Molefi Asante [the ideological father of Afrocentrism and a Temple University professor] or any serious black nationalist, because they're ideologically opposed to our views."

The Rev. Eugene Rivers, pastor of Boston's Azusa Christian Community and a fellow at the Center for the Study of Values and Public Life at Harvard Divinity School, argues that Kennedy comes close to betraying a political tradition to which he is partly indebted. "All of the moral arguments that provided the affirmative-action context for him to benefit and make it to Harvard Law School were based on claims about a unique historical experience of racial discrimination," Rivers says. "And now he's attempting to debunk those same claims, from the other side of the affirmative-action door."

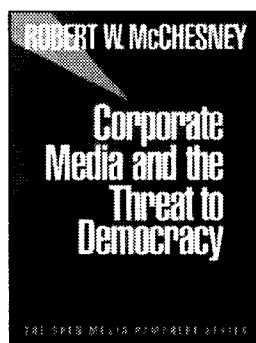
Affirmative action is still necessary. Stereotyping by race—and the denial of guilt for slavery—is deeply embedded in American culture: Even while practicing slavery, Americans saw themselves as the champions of liberty. Opponents of affirmative action—and, it seems, a growing number of critics of identity politics—promote the ideal of color-blindness, oblivious to the very real conditions that make blacks see life differently. Fifty-two percent of all black children are growing up in poverty; half of our nation's prison cells are being filled by blacks, who comprise 12 percent of the population.

Despite Sleeper's utopian hopes and Kennedy's vision of global fellow-feeling, the noxious views that Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray espoused in *The Bell Curve* still resonate with many Americans. Tiger Woods' success enables many whites to bask in the comforting illusion that race is no longer a barrier to equality, even while confronted with data that solidly refute that fallacy. The dynamic of denial is a powerful force to overcome. Kennedy and Sleeper—whether intentionally or not—make that effort more difficult. ◀

## AVAILABLE from IN THESE TIMES

"In this fine study, Robert McChesney points out that the extent of public participation into communication policymaking is a measure of the level of democracy, and that the U.S. is achieving new records in decline of such participation. ... McChesney's work has been of extraordinary importance. ... It should be read with care and concern by people who care about freedom and basic rights."

—Noam Chomsky



**Corporate Media and the Threat to Democracy \$4.95**

Send payment to:

In These Times, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647

Add \$2.00 for shipping and handling



# C L A S S I F I E D S

## ▷ HELP WANTED

**IN THESE TIMES** seeks an assistant editor. Responsibilities include editing, supervising fact-checking by interns, copy-editing and proof-reading. Candidates must demonstrate familiarity with the magazine. Starting salary \$18,000 plus 4 weeks vacation and full benefits. Minorities and women strongly encouraged to apply. Send cover letter, résumé, two writing samples and the names of three references to Deidre McFadyen, Executive Editor, *In These Times*, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647.

**CAQ (COVERT ACTION QUARTERLY)** seeks editorial staff member with journalism experience, ability to meet deadlines and work independently. Development skills a plus. Understanding of U.S./world politics required. Women/people of color encouraged. Résumé by July 15 to CAQ Jobsearch, 1500 Mass. Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20005.

**BUSINESS/DEVELOPMENT Manager** — Small non-profit performing arts organization, 30-40 hrs./mo. \$4,000/yr. Letter, résumé: Links Hall, 3435 N. Sheffield, 2nd Fl., Chicago, IL 60657. (773) 281-0824.

**CHAPTER DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR:** The New Party is a new progressive political party that has won 130 of its first 200 races around the country. It seeks an experienced organizer to train, supervise and support local staff and leadership in building political power in working-class and of-color communities. Will help local affiliates develop and implement political, fundraising, membership and leadership development plans. Must have labor, community, or political organizing experience and experience supervising organizers. Must be able to travel.

el. Women and minority applicants strongly encouraged. Salary BOE. Send resume, letter to Dan Cantor, 122 S. Main St., Suite 270, Ann Arbor, MI 48104; fax 313-747-6794.

**PROGRESSIVE WEEKLY NEWS-MAGAZINE** seeks detail-oriented, impeccably organized, highly motivated editorial assistant to work on all aspects of editorial process for Books and the Arts section. Candidates should have excellent written and oral communications skills; fact-checking, editing and administrative experience; and a passion for books. Position requires an ability to meet strict weekly deadlines and coordinate copy flow. People of color strongly encouraged to apply. Send résumé, cover letter and writing sample to *The Nation*, Box CL 18, 72 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10011. No calls or faxes, please. AA/EOE

**COMMUNITY JOBS:** The Employment Newspaper for the Non-Profit Sector. Join over 50,000 job-seekers in reading a unique monthly publication containing more than 200 new job listings (in Environment, Arts, International, Health, Youth, Civil

## SOUTH AFRICA

OCTOBER 16 - 26

- Meet with youth activists at the University of Witwatersrand
- Talk to the ANC Women's League
- Attend a local jazz concert

GLOBAL EXCHANGE • 800-497-1994

## ART sale!



- ◊ Most illustrations, cartoons and collages appearing in *In These Times* are available for reprint.
- ◊ Many originals are available for purchase.
- ◊ In *In These Times* illustrators are available for hire on a freelance basis.

**Call (773) 772-0100, x246**

## Socialist

A democratic socialist view of life and politics from the Socialist Party USA.  
\$9.00 per year (6 issues).

516 W. 25th St. #404, NY, NY 10001  
(212) 691-0776

## JEWISH CURRENTS

June, 1997 Issue

"Peace Now Forces in Israel and USA," editorial; "Har Homa or Abu Ghoneim?" by Michael Tanzer; "Meshugga about Yiddish," poem by David Zeiger; "Readable, Not So Readable, Jewish Fiction," by Roger B. Goodman; "Harry Golden and 'The Coat,'" by Sonia Pressman Fuentes.

Single issue: \$3 (USA only).  
Subscription: \$30 yearly (USA only).

JEWISH CURRENTS  
Dept. T, Suite 601,  
22 E. 17 St., New York, NY 10003.

Can a 4-page monthly paper stir up a Workers Revolution?

## The NEW UNIONIST is trying!

We don't have space to waste so each issue gets right to the point —

• Economic, social and environmental problems can't be solved under capitalism. Fighting for a *new system* is the only practical course of action.

• *Real socialism* is not state control from the top down. It's a stateless *workplace democracy* from the bottom up.

• One big union of the working class — blue-collar, white-collar, pink-collar, hot-under-the-collar — will give us the economic power to fight the corporations today, and manage *our* economy tomorrow.

• A workers' political party with a single demand — *The Workplaces to the Workers!* — can educate and rally the majority for a revolution at the ballot box, the people's mandate for Economic Democracy.

\$5 for 12 issues to:

NEW UNIONIST, 2309 Nicollet,  
#102-A, Minneapolis MN 55404

Rights, Housing, Human Services, etc.). Featuring informative articles, book reviews, resource lists, profiles of nonprofit organizations and the people who found them. Contact: Community Jobs, 1001 Connecticut Ave. NW, Ste. 838, Wash., DC 20036.

**IN THESE TIMES** seeks volunteer interns with an interest in progressive politics and independent publishing to help with web-page design, data collection, and radio marketing. Send résumé and cover letter to Jake Blankenship, ITT, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647.

#### ► PUBLICATIONS

**CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM.** 12-page reprint of debate in *Boston Review* with Ellen Miller, Russell Feingold, Steve Rosenthal, Doug Phelps, Joshua Rosenkranz, Bruce Ackerman, others. \$1.50 each; bulk discounts. *Boston Review*, E53-407 MIT, Cambridge, MA 02139; (617) 253-3642.

**DO YOU HAVE** spanking fantasies? We do—hundreds—and ours are for sale. Romantic, erotic, disciplinary,

wherever the muse wanders. For a 24-page catalogue send \$3.00 to CF Publications, Box 706TT, E. Setauket, NY.

#### ► FOR SALE

Two 17" monochrome Apple monitors. Both are in good working order and include necessary video cards. \$125 each, or \$200 for both. Call (773) 772-0100, ext. 239.

#### ► FOR RENT

**CHICAGO—SMALL OFFICE SPACE** for business or personal use. \$150/month includes util. Use of office equipment negotiable. Call Jim Weinstein at (773) 772-0100, ext. 223.

#### ► FOREIGN LANGUAGES

**SPANISH IN GUANAJUATO—TWO** weeks, \$255. Instituto Falcon, Jorge Barroso, Mora 158, Guanajuato, Gto 36000, Mexico. Ph/Fax: (473) 2-36-94. <http://www.infonet.com.mx/falcon>.

**SPANISH, CULTURE, TOURS,** at Escuela Azteca. Summer in beautiful Cuernavaca. \$220 two weeks. Intensive grammar all levels. Weekend

tours. Minicourses with Ross Gandy, Ph.D. (Mexico: Reform or Revolution?). Live with Mexican family. For brochure: call (52-73)-15-24-69. Address: ESCUELA AZTECA, Apdo. Postal 76-005; 04201 Mexico, D.F.

**A PEOPLE VACATION** in beautiful Guatemala. Personalized Spanish classes at indigenous owned school. Volunteer opportunities. Fantastic excursions. R&B with local family plus 5 hrs/day of classes is \$130/wk. Contact CBA, 1432 Elizabeth Street, Lexington, KY 40503, (606) 278-5008. E-mail [pwuff@uky.campus.mci.net](mailto:pwuff@uky.campus.mci.net).

#### ► MISCELLANEOUS

**ABOLISH ZOO PRISONS.** No Animals in carnivals, circuses. Contact PO Box 428, Watertown, NY 13601-0428 or (315) 782-1858.

**GOV'T FORECLOSED** homes from pennies on \$1. Delinquent tax, Repo's, REO's. Your area. Toll free (800) 218-9000, Ext. H-3077 for current listings.

**SEIZED CARS** from \$175. Porsches, Cadillacs, Chevys, BMW's, Corvettes. Also Jeeps, 4WD's. Your area. Toll free (800) 218-9000, Ext. A-3077 for current listings.

#### ► BUMPER STICKERS

**"DON'T BLAME ME, I VOTED FOR RALPH."** \$2.50. NY residents add 8.25% sales tax. M.A.R.S. Services, P.O. Box 796, Bridgehampton, NY 11932.

#### ► PERSONALS

**EROTIC, INTELLIGENT,** imaginative conversation—Discreet, personal and pleasurable. Please inquire (617) 661-3849.

#### CONCERNED SINGLES NEWSLETTER

links compatible singles who care about peace, social justice, gender equity, racism, and the environment.

Nationwide. Since 1984. All ages.

FREE SAMPLE: Box 444-IT,

Lenox Dale, MA 01242; (413) 445-6309;


OR <http://www.concernedsingles.com>

#### New Political Science

Radical scholarship on today's political issues. **Special price! \$25 for 4 issues**

Gvt. Dpt., Suffolk Univ., Boston, MA 02108  
617-573-8126

**GOOD VIBRATIONS**



Friendly, informative catalog of sex toys, books & videos, \$4.  
1210 Valencia #1T  
San Francisco, CA 94110

#### STUDY IN CUBA

• Language instruction at the University of Havana

• Cultural immersion  
• Salsa y playa

OFFERED MONTHLY

GLOBAL EXCHANGE 1.800.497.1994

#### CHIAPAS

##### CHALLENGING HISTORY

INDIGENOUS VIEWPOINTS ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTHERN MEXICO

SPECIAL EDITION OF *AKWEKON JOURNAL*.  
SINGLE ISSUE: \$14.00 PPD. ONE-YEAR SUBSCRIPTION:  
\$18.00 (U.S.) CHECK/VISA/MC TO:  
300-IT CALDWELL HALL,  
CORNELL UNIVERSITY, ITHACA, NY 14853

#### Thomas Paine VIDEOCASSETTE

This educational, "very informative," and "fascinating" 40-minute video, written and hosted by Thomas Paine Scholar Carl Shapiro, was telecast via cable TV throughout northern New Jersey in the spring of 1992. In this original, unedited video, the essential meaning of Paine's extraordinary career as revolutionary writer and foremost exponent of democratic principles is recounted in a presentation "sure in its content" and clear in its delivery. A discussion of little-known but significant incidents in Paine's life adds immeasurably to this memorable video.

VHS cassette, \$25.00 ppd. (USA)

INDEPENDENT PUBLICATIONS, P.O. BOX 102, RIDGEFIELD, NJ 07657

## IN THESE TIMES classified ads work like your own sales force.

#### Word Rates:

95¢ per word / 1-2 issues  
85¢ per word / 3-5 issues  
80¢ per word / 6-9 issues  
75¢ per word / 10-19 issues  
65¢ per word / 20 + issues

#### Display Inch Rates:

\$30 per inch / 1-2 issues  
\$28 per inch / 3-5 issues  
\$26 per inch / 6-9 issues  
\$24 per inch / 10-19 issues  
\$22 per inch / 20 + issues

Classified ads must be prepaid. Send your copy, coupon, and payment to:  
**IN THESE TIMES, Classified Ads, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647.**

Enclosed is my check for \$\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ issue(s).

Please indicate desired heading \_\_\_\_\_

Advertiser \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Continued from page 40

squeegee kid.

"I got out of the car and started talking to him," Colle says. "And he just started swearing at me. I was totally flabbergasted. I said, 'Look, I didn't ask for you to come and do this.'"

Soon, Colle says, many staff members and constituents came forward with similar stories. Colle raised the issue in the press, and Toronto police announced that they would begin ticketing squeegee kids. By midsummer, the police were issuing about 150 tickets a month, at \$105 a pop. Conservative members of Toronto's city council picked up the baton. Council member Chris Korwin-Kuczynski put forward a motion calling for the police to target problem locations. He also called for a bylaw to make the squeegee trade illegal.

Colle calls it "a quality-of-life issue." Quality of life, of course, is a loaded phrase. Usually, it stands for the law-enforcement theory that argues that a city's plunge into hard-core crime is preceded by small-scale decline: unkempt streets, broken windows and, well, squeegee cleaners. According to this theory, indifference to small problems paves the way for deeper misrule.

"Disorder is a precursor to serious crime, and more and more, there is a demand to do something about this sense of disorder in the streets," George Kelling, a Harvard political-science professor who has studied squeegeers in the United States, told the *New York Times*.

Rudolph Giuliani won the 1994 New York mayor's race on a platform that aggressively targeted activities such as stoplight squeegee cleaning. He even harangued squeegee men in his stump speech. When Giuliani took office, police cracked down with speed and ferocity.

In Toronto, where a clean self-image translates into more than \$5 billion in tourist traffic each year, tolerance of panhandling might well be considered political suicide. According to Kelling's logic, cracking down on squeegee "intimidators," as Colle called them, would preserve the city's image.

Or maybe not. When the motion to target problem locations finally made it to the top of the pile in September, the council defeated it by a vote of nine to eight. While many U.S. cities were issuing full stop powers to police for squeegee cleaners, Toronto was easing up.

When push came to shove, the city politicians couldn't justify pinning the blame on the squeegee kids. The real culprit, they said, was the jobless economy.

"If we've got a problem with squeegee kids, it's because there aren't any jobs," says city council member Peter Tabuns, who spearheaded the no vote. "They are a nuisance; I don't blame people for being upset. But this problem isn't going anywhere quick."

Instead of authorizing a crackdown, the council commissioned studies of the squeegee kids' situation and launched appeals to the federal government to provide more funding for youth jobs. Then, to top it off, they set aside \$200,000 of their own money to help pay for job-skills training programs for squeegee kids.

This wasn't just political patty-cake; many residents firmly back Tabuns. Local drivers called up Steve Ellis, a city council member who originally supported the crackdown, to voice their concern. "I started getting calls saying, 'Hey, lay off the kids,'" Ellis says. "At first I was pretty hard-line, but I saw the debate unfold and kind of softened."

The soft touch has to do partly with the famed Canadian progressive streak, which usually seeks to avoid imposing draconian measures on its population. But the gentle approach is also due to the unique demographics of Toronto's squeegeers. In major American cities, the squeegee cleaners are middle-aged, often black and more than half have faced criminal charges, Kelling's research found. Racism fuels crackdowns as much as anything else.

But Toronto has young, white squeegeers. "The language is all wrong for a crackdown," says Rick Salutin, a left-wing columnist for the *Globe and Mail*. "How can you crack down on something called the squeegee kids? It's like cracking down on the Cabbage Patch Dolls."

The political wrangle hasn't stopped Lisa and her work mates. For the time being, she and the city have struck an odd truce, and she'll work through the cease-fire.

"Summer's here," she says as she launches herself off the curb again. "I'm gonna do about half my year's business in four months."

Clive Thompson is a features editor at *Shift* magazine and a freelance writer for various publications.

## STAUGHTON LYND

"Staughton Lynd is possessed of a distinctive and important voice. His wide-ranging interests are united around a profound intellectual curiosity, a noteworthy willingness to listen, a plain-spoken eloquence, and a keen eye for vivid evidence."

—DAVID ROEDIGER,  
author of *The Wages  
of Whiteness: Rage  
and the Making  
of the American  
Working Class*

AN ILR PRESS BOOK  
18 b&w photos  
\$39.95 cloth,  
\$15.95 paper

A steadfast  
radical's  
thoughts  
on rebuilding  
the movement



## LIVING INSIDE OUR HOPE

"Sure to inspire, arouse, and provoke. . . . In an age when *radical* is used to describe the latest basketball shoe, Lynd reminds us of our heritage of agitators and troublemakers who have won us such amenities as an eight-hour workday and racial integration. . . . A valuable resource for new generations of 'long distance runners' as well as for anyone interested in social change."—*Publishers Weekly*

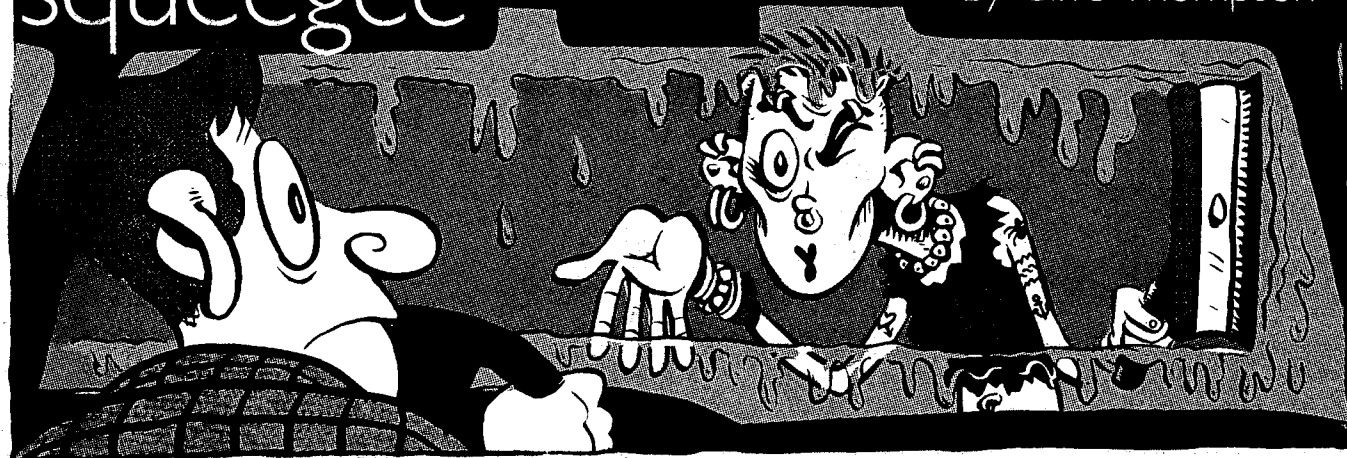
At bookstores, or call (607) 277-2211

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS



# The kids squeegee

By Clive Thompson



©1997 TERRY LABAN

When the light turns red, Lisa dips her squeegee cleaner in a bucket of cleaning fluid and leaps off the curb. Flicking excess fluid off the sponge, the 15-year-old darts around the front of a black Suburu, the first car stopped at the intersection. As she wipes off the car's windshield, she flashes a toothy grin at the driver, highlighting the steel stud piercing her lip.

The driver isn't fazed; he's got this urban ritual down cold. Reaching into his change tray, he pulls out a dollar coin, rolls down the window and drops the money in her hand.

"Thanks, mister," she says, and leaps back to the curb. She joins a group of other teenagers, all in varying punk styles of dress and all holding squeegee cleaners.

The kids work the corner with ruthless efficiency. They're alarmingly good at this. Even a tiny, shaved-head girl is cleaning each windshield with only six powerful, well-placed strokes. At downtown gas stations, I've seen fume-addled grown men with far worse technique—and they're getting paid full-time to do it.

Not that these kids are lagging far behind. Lisa makes between \$150 and \$250 a week. "The winter was kind of cruel," she says. "But now that it's warm, business is booming."

A couple of years ago, Toronto didn't have homeless windshield washers. They were a foreign phenomenon, markers of urban decay that residents assumed existed only in the social and political Ponzi scheme that the United States has become. But this was Toronto, a place that prided itself on being squeaky clean: "a kind of New York operated by the Swiss," as Peter Ustinov once put it.

As a carefully and centrally planned community, Toronto's downtown core has remained heavily residential, with low-rise Victorian houses sitting cheek-by-jowl with small businesses. Urban critic Jane Jacobs, who lives in the city, has

called it the most livable place in North America. Although more than 4 million live in the greater Toronto area, the crime rate is so low that the town seems vaguely square.

But in recent years, the rise of squeegee kids has provoked a minor crisis in Toronto's cherished self-image. The kids first appeared in 1995 and reached record numbers last summer, when city officials estimated that more than 100 regulars were on the streets. Even in the dead of winter, when temperatures neared zero, a number of diehards were still working every day.

It's the youthfulness of the squeegeers that unsettles the city's pundits. Toronto has long had a highly visible homeless population, most notably older Canadian Indians. But the squeegeers are almost uniformly white and working-class, ranging from their early teens to early 20s. Aside from the profusion of tattoos and eyebrow piercings, they don't look much different from average college students.

In reality, many of these kids are just as homeless as their older counterparts. They are a potent indicator of how badly Canada's early-'90s recession has ravaged Toronto. Since 1991, overall unemployment has rarely dipped much below 10 percent. But for youth, the rate has been double that. The federal bank's decade-long, monomaniacal attack on inflation provoked astronomic interest rates that dried up consumer spending, taking jobs away. Sure, things are roaring in the paper economy; the Toronto Stock Exchange broke 6,000 in November for the first time ever. But on the streets, squeegee cleaning is the new economic model—sustainable begging.

"I'd do something else if I could," says Jeff, a 16-year-old squeegee in a Forgotten Rebels jacket. "But my parents kicked me out of the house. Didn't agree with my lifestyle. It ain't easy. This keeps me legal, at least."

As the squeegee kids multiplied, it was probably inevitable that local politicians would gun for a crackdown. It began last summer, when Mike Colle—a provincial politician whose district is in Toronto—had a windshield wiper broken by a

*Continued on page 39*

I N T H E E N D